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LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

BY

WILLIAM H. LEATHEM, M.A.

AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE WITH THE TWO GARDENS," "THE COMRADE IN WHITE," ETC.

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PREFACE

THIS book is designed as an introduction to the life of St. Francis. Many incidents have been passed over as outside the scope of a short biography. The most notable of these are the presence of Francis at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and his meeting with St. Dominic.

Those readers who desire from this small beginning to build up by degrees a Franciscan library are advised to secure, first, three volumes to which I owe much. They are "The Life of St. Francis of Assisi" by Father Cuthbert (Longmans, Green & Co.); "The Little Flowers of Saint Francis," translated by T. W. Arnold (J. M. Dent & Co.); and that beautiful little book, "St. Francis and His Friends," by Horatio Grimley, published by the Cambridge University Press.

To the publishers of these I desire to express my warm thanks for permission to avail myself of certain translations from the original Chronicles of which they hold the copyright. I would also acknowledge the kindness of Messrs. Sidgwick

and Jackson in allowing the quotations from Mr. Laurence Housman's "Little Plays of St. Francis"; of Messrs. George Allen & Unwin in permitting a quotation from Maeterlinck's "Wisdom and Destiny," and, once again, of the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press in giving leave to use the translation of the death scene in the Œdipus Coloneus.

It is seven hundred years since Francis of Assisi died, yet the world still has need of him. Those who read these pages cannot fail to see that they are written not in order that we may live a dream-life in the past, but that we may find help to meet with courage the demands of the present.

W. H. LEATHEM.

HELENSBURGH,
3rd March, 1926.

ST. FRANCIS—THE OUTWARD MAN

"A MAN most eloquent, cheerful in face, in demeanour benign, free from listlessness, without affectation, of moderate stature, verging towards littleness ; head medium-sized and round, face however oblong and prominent, brow smooth and low, eyes neither large nor small, but dark and looking straight out, hair dark, eyebrows straight, nose well-formed, delicate and straight, ears erect but small, temples smooth, tongue peaceful, ardent and eager ; voice strong, sweet, clear and sonorous, teeth close, uniform and white, lips not large but thin, beard dark, but not full, neck slender, shoulders straight, arms short, hands small, fingers long, nails lengthy, legs slender, feet small, skin fine, flesh little of it, attire rough, sleep of the briefest, generous-handed."

(Translation by HORATIO GRIMLEY, M.A., in *St. Francis and his Friends*, Chap. xxxiii.)

ST. FRANCIS—THE INWARD MAN

"O HOW beautiful, how splendid, how glorious he appeared in innocency of life, in simplicity of words, in purity of heart, in the love of God, in brotherly charity, in passionate obedience, in heartfelt devotion, in angelic aspect! Sweet in manners, placid by nature, affable in speech, appropriate in exhortation, most faithful in another's service, prudent in counsel, capable in affairs, gracious in all things. Serene in mind, gentle in soul, sober in spirit, rapt in contemplation, constant in prayer, and in all things fervent. Constant in purpose, unshakeable in virtue, persevering in grace, and in all things the same. Swift to pardon, slow to wrath, liberal in thought, clear in memory, subtle in dissertation, circumspect in choosing, and simple in all things. Austere towards himself, gentle towards others, discerning towards all."

(Translation by HORATIO GRIMLEY, M.A., in *St. Francis and his Friends*, Chap. xxxii.)

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" And with the dawn Assisi
Shines in thine eyes, and all her windowed towers,
And peering walls that climb, roof above roof,
Up the steep hill. Then the dim darkling streets
Awake, doors open, and the market hums—
And there's Assisi—dancing ! "

LAURENCE HOUSMAN
(*Little Plays of St. Francis*)

LIFE OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

CHAPTER I

THE MERRY HEART AND THE WAY OF FAILURE

When our hearts are cast down by the mystery of life, and our spirits desolate and fearful, there are stories from the past which come to us with a singular power of refreshment. Such a story is that of Francis of Assisi, who was so true a disciple of his Master, that his life not only confirms the far-off experience of the men and women of the New Testament, but even, in some of its pages, seems to bring the Saviour Himself nearer to us by a span of twelve hundred years. On the receptive soul of the Poor Man of Assisi we see another image stamped. There is a parallelism, sometimes designed, sometimes undesigned, between the life of Christ and the life of His servant Francis, that fills us with wonder and awe.

The only explanation of the life that began

at Assisi is the life of Him who was born at Bethlehem. It was the Divine radiance that Francis caught. The dependence of Francis upon Jesus is absolute, unchallenged, written in letters of golden sacrifice upon every page of his biography. He is Christ's man. It is for that reason that none may grudge to call him Saint. And he comes out of the undivided Church of the West, whose inheritance descended not to Rome alone, but to Canterbury and Geneva also. He is the least ecclesiastical, the most universal, of saints. To know his story is to love him, and to all who love him he becomes a friend, a possession.

Francis was born at Assisi in the Italian province of Umbria in the year 1182, when the twelfth century was within sight of its goal. He was happy in his birthplace. There is an incomparable charm in its situation, in its neighbourhood, in its purity of atmosphere, in its wide vistas of earth and sky, in its intimacy with the mountains and its indebtedness to the plains. I saw it first in the magical beauty that it borrowed from the light of the setting sun ; and it seemed like a dream city of the imagination, embodying not the prosaic things of this work-a-day world, but the splendour of some high romance. Other cities of historic fame may disappoint us, but

Assisi never. It carries its storied past proudly, and everywhere it makes boast of that strange citizen who has consecrated its stones, and made it for all the world a place of pilgrimage.

There are legends of the birth of Francis, but we need not linger over them.

So surely did he carry Christ with him into his later life, that men wove around his birth a garment of fable, and would have it that like his Master he was born in a stable, and that angel voices sang melodies of heaven, in the solemn hush before the dawn, to herald the coming of the babe. Not so, we may be sure, did Francis come, yet was his coming the sunrise of a new day of grace for the world. Dante bids us rename the city of that birth, and call it no longer Assisi, but the East, the Sun-rising.

Francis came into a world that needed him. There was strife not love among the cities of Italy, and they sprang to arms as lightly then as we go to-day to our sports and pastimes. There was deep corruption in the Church. One of its leaders had cried : " It is no longer true that the priests are as bad as the people, for the priests are worse than the people." The Crusades for the deliverance of the Holy Land and the Holy Sepulchre, while not without their moral grandeur, had resulted in a wide-

spread demoralization of conduct, and a widespread dissemination of the spirit of unbelief and revolt, results similar to those we have seen in our own time through the Great War. For thus it always is when men of many lands meet and mingle.

Yet in some respects Francis was happy in the time of his coming. The long night of the Dark Ages was already past. The wickedness of paganism had been cleansed and expiated. The world was waking to joy. Those joyous sisters, Art and Poetry had found in France and Italy a home.

Nature was beginning to be loved not with the sensuous, and often grossly sensual, love of paganism with its nature religions, but with a fresh and simple rapture. Francis had a remarkable precursor in the monk Joachim, who filled all Italy with the hope of a new era, preaching vehemently like John the Baptist of the coming of the Kingdom.

This brave forerunner divided life into three eras : of the Father, of the Son, of the Spirit : the rule of law, the rule of grace, and the rule of love. In the first men feared, in the second they found the rest of faith, in the third the fire of love burned in them. Joachim predicted that the Holy Ghost would come into the hearts

of men with such sweetness of love, that they would break forth into songs of praise to God rather than keep silence. Then would come an Easter jubilee, in which all mysteries would be made clear. The earth would be filled with the knowledge of God. Christ would receive an almost universal homage as the Son of God. The era of spiritual gladness would open before men, and their hearts would rejoice.

What Joachim preached he illustrated by many an impulsive and joyous action, as on that day when he led a wondering congregation out of their dim and shadowed Church into the open air, there to sing in God's gracious sunlight a hymn of adoration to the Creator. Here truly is the veritable forerunner of Francis of Assisi.

Francis was a cloth-merchant's son, and in the world as it then was the position was an enviable one. Peter Bernardone travelled from city to city, from land to land. Everywhere he was as sure of a welcome as the daily newspaper when it enters our homes to-day. They were stirring times, and the dominant ideas that were abroad in Europe found in these travelling merchants their chief interpreters. There was a famine of news, only to be alleviated when the merchant came to tell of the latest policy of Pope or Emperor, the latest heresy of some fanatical

brotherhood, the latest quarrel between Assisi and Perugia, or between Florence and Siena. Great honour then for the wealthy merchant with his tales of other lands, and great profit too, for besides his lucrative bales of goods, he was, as often as not, banker and money-changer into the bargain.

It is not strange, therefore, that the mother of Francis, the Lady Pica, was of noble birth, and possibly of French origin. She it was, no doubt, who taught Francis his love of music and song, and especially of the love-songs of the troubadours. Her boy grew up gay, light-hearted, full of laughter and song. He was the companion of the young nobles, who, though superior to him in station, were inferior in wealth. Nothing Francis loved more than to fling money about with lavish hand, a strange anticipation of that day when he flung away all that he had, and became betrothed to the Lady Poverty. Soon Francis was the ringleader in wine and song and revel, and in all the foolish escapades of reckless youth. Easily he slipped from such things into the gross sins of the flesh. Such, at least, is the assertion of his earliest biographer, Thomas of Celano, whose first life was written immediately after the death of Francis. The life by St. Bonaventura, written more than thirty

years after, acquits Francis of wantonness. On which side does the truth lie? Obviously, I imagine, with the earlier writer. Mrs. Oliphant, in her charming book, "Francis of Assisi" writes :—"Some of his biographers, with that curious instinct common to religious writers in all ages, which throws double shades of darkness on the beginning of a saint's career, in order to bring out more brightly the lights of the after picture, have attributed a certain licence and wantonness to the young man in his secular state, but, so far as we can make out, without the least warrant for so doing." This is a light-hearted way of driving out of the witness box the earliest, and absolutely contemporary, evidence.

If this is not warrant for a statement, what is? And the argument used is double-edged. It is quite clear that later biographers looked upon the fact of the stigmata as demanding the immaculateness of the youth of Francis. How else was his body worthy, so they argued, to bear the wounds of Christ? The doctrinal intention in the later version is clear, and to doubt a well-attested fact, so sadly consonant with all that we know of the immorality of the times, because we should like that fact to be different, is a desperate expedient in biography. Only when Francis became a

saint and a national hero was the veil drawn over the follies and sins of his early years.

I believe that Francis came to Christ out of a deep humiliation of failure. That dread word from which ardent youth shrinks, as it shrinks from ridicule, is to me the key of the conversion of Francis. He failed as a merchant, for no one was ever more unfitted for buying and selling. He failed as a soldier, for not only did he languish for a year in the prison of Perugia, having been taken prisoner in battle, but on a later date when he rode off in his pride to join Walter de Brienne in a military expedition, he came back hastily, ingloriously, almost ignominiously. He failed as a son, for the alienation between him and his father deepened with every passing year. His mother, sad at heart at what was thrown in her face as to his manner of life, could only cling to a mother's pathetic faith, and answer :—"What are these cruel things that you say of my dear son? He shall yet prove himself, by Heaven's grace, a child of God." But as a child of God, Francis was a failure too. The deep melancholy which at times overshadowed him, and especially after a serious illness, was the outer expression of a soul that knew itself exiled by its own follies from the white life of purity and from the joy of a true discipleship. Yet

out of the miry clay of failure and folly God lifted His child, and made his name a praise in all the earth. There are two lines, which come to us from somewhere far back in our literature, that express with a singular felicity the two sides of that tremendous change :—

> "God is a tower without a stair,
> And His perfection loves despair."

In the swirling stream of Francis' early days were two firm rocks. He loved the Church, and he loved the poor ; and he who so loves is not far from the love of Christ. The first gleam of the Divine Light that was to call him forward to new, strange paths fell upon Francis during a severe illness that followed his imprisonment at Perugia. Dim seemed the light as it penetrated his gloom ; uncertain seemed the way that lost itself in shadows ; vague and indefinite were the hopes that troubled while they comforted those days of weakness and of convalescence. Yet in that twilight of the soul the energy of a new life was born.

The second stage was reached in the hour when Francis saw his early dream of a romantic, splendid, military career approaching its fulfilment. Ere he went forth to the great expedition of Walter de Brienne he dreamed a dream in which he was called by name and shown a palace

hung with splendid weapons. Amazed, he asked for whom such resplendent armour was prepared, and what great lord owned so wonderful a palace. "Thine is this great abode," answered the voice, "and this shining armour is for thee, and for the knights who shall follow thee in battle."

The dream consciousness of Francis invites the interest of the modern mind, which no longer consigns dreams to the lumber-rooms of superstition and folly. The ardent mind of Francis was swayed at many turning points of his life by the visions of the night. The dream of the glorious palace kindled his pride to boastfulness. He had found no Interpreter in his stately house, no wise teachers in his Palace Beautiful, and arrogantly he revealed his coming greatness to his companions at Assisi. "I know right well," he said, "that I shall become a great prince." His depression gone, his career assured, he rode out of Assisi—splendid and envied. At Spoleto he rested for the night. And there God spoke to him again. Sabatier will have it that the young nobles, his companions, reproached him for his arrogance and drove him home. But this is merely a conjecture, perhaps the too subtle conjecture of an acute mind. The early narrative is in no need of emendation for it is confirmed by many other

spiritual calls from the time of St. Paul onwards. Again at Spoleto, in a vision of the night, when according to the Franciscan Chronicles he was but half asleep, the Voice came, reproaching him for choosing to follow the servant rather than the Master : " Who is able to render thee the more good, the Lord or the servant ? " " The Lord," answered Francis. " Why, then, dost thou leave the Lord for the servant, the Prince for a retainer ? " Francis replied in the very words of Saul of Tarsus : " What dost Thou wish me to do, Lord ? " " Return," said the warning voice, " return to thine own country, and it shall be told thee what thou shalt do ; for the vision which thou hast seen, it behoveth thee to interpret differently." In the morning, Francis mounted his horse, and rode back to Assisi. The great renunciation had begun.

Mr. Laurence Housman makes Francis say : " Before our Lord upon the Cross I found that fighting meant nothing, and the Cross everything." That pregnant phrase goes as near to the heart of this mystery as we shall ever get. We need great causes for great actions. Nor will any power save that of the Cross explain what befell Francis now or hereafter. Yet the cup which the young knight of Assisi chose to drink was a cup of bitterness. He returned to his old

life in Assisi, but with a difference. He was often so sunk in his own thoughts that his companions made mock of him. He was in their eyes a good comrade changed and spoiled.

Three incidents may serve to throw light upon his brooding thoughts. One day he fell behind his companions, moody and detached. "Art thou in love, Francis?" they cried; "hast found a maiden to be thy wife, that thou must be ever thinking of her charms and beauty?" "Yes, in truth," answered Francis, "I am thinking of taking a wife more noble and beautiful and richer than ye have ever seen." In that enigmatic saying we see his nature turning to the life of utter poverty—his Lady Poverty as he called her afterwards with such devotion.

The second incident was a visit to Rome, where he emptied his full purse at the tombs of the apostles, and then changing his fine clothes for the rags of a beggar stood for hours at the gate of St. Peter's begging alms from those who passed in and out.

The third incident followed his return to Assisi.

Francis had given himself much to prayer, seeking a higher manhood. And in this secret place of his soul's life there came to him a promise, as real to his heart as the spoken word of a friend. His nature was to be changed.

What he had loved he was to renounce. What he had despised he was to covet. What he had feared he was to embrace willingly.

There was one special fear and loathing in the nature of Francis, entrenched there since boyhood, not to be eradicated by his own will-power. It was his fear of leprosy, his shrinking from the leper. On that battlefield of the soul God gave him now the promised victory.

It was his custom to mount his horse, and go in quest of solitude. Riding thus on one of the narrow hill-tracks he found right in his path a leper. There was no hiding-place from this unsought companion. And though the old dread clutched at his heart, the new Francis desired no escape, nor sought to evade love's opportunity. Dismounting he gave money to the leper, and then, stung by a nobler impulse, kissed the outstretched palm, and craved in return from his outcast brother the kiss of peace.

In that moment of release the love of Christ had banished the haunting dread of leprosy's hideous contagion. The secret complex of fear was dissolved for ever, and in fulfilment of the Divine promise Francis would give himself henceforth to serve and love those who had wakened in him hitherto nothing but terror and aversion.

Here Francis has passed the cross-roads of his destiny. His call has been heard, and his choice made. On that day when he embraced the leper, Francis had placed his hand in Christ's to the joy and peace of his own soul. Little did he dream then of the multitudes who would follow his leading into the shelter of the love of Jesus. A strange way is the way of failure, for God can make it the high road to victory.

CHAPTER II

THE SHRINE AT SAN DAMIANO

Not far from Assisi is a little wayside church, San Damiano, which is the home of great memories. It is, perhaps, the least changed of all the places intimately connected with the story of Francis. Still there inhabits it a spirit of sanctity and of peace. Thither came Francis for one of the decisive hours of his life. He had already been subject for some time to what we should call mystical experiences, when the outward things of sense lost their hold upon him, and the spirit was invaded and captured by another and a diviner world. An early Franciscan Chronicle gives us an account of one of the Saint's experiences, which came to him in the open air without association with Church or sacred symbol: "And lo! suddenly he was visited by the Lord, and with so much sweetness was his heart filled that he was able neither to speak nor to move, and could not be conscious of anything or hear anything, but that sweetness which so alienated him from carnal sense, that, as he himself after-

wards said, if he had then been sliced into pieces, he could not have stirred from the spot."

In the half-ruined little Church of San Damiano Francis renewed still more wonderfully that experience. This is how the old tale runs : " Now a few days after, as he was walking near the Church of San Damiano, the word came unto him in the Spirit that he should enter in and pray. Having entered in he began to pray fervently before a certain image of the Crucified One, which with affection and benignity spoke to him, saying : ' Francis, dost thou not see that my House is falling into ruin ? Go, therefore, and repair it for me.' Trembling and wondering, he said : ' Willingly will I do so, Lord.' For he understood then the words to be spoken of that Church of San Damiano which from its very great antiquity was threatened with approaching ruin."

Here it is not difficult to disentangle the true from the legendary. The pictured sufferings of the Redeemer, acting upon the acutely sensitive and loving heart of Francis, induced that mystical state in which it was possible for him to hold communion not with the symbol but with the Living Saviour Himself, who thus commissioned the Poor Man of Assisi for his life-work. At first he took quite literally the message that

came with such vividness to his soul, and set about rebuilding San Damiano. Not till later did he realize that it was the crumbling, tottering fabric of the Christian Church that his weak life was enjoined to save from ruin. However we conceive the experience of that hour of prayer in San Damiano, it was the energy of heroism in the life of St. Francis from that day forward. In the words of those who knew him, and knew the secret of his devotion : *Ab illa hora vulneratum et liquefactum est cor ejus ad memoriam Dominicæ passionis* —" From that hour wounded and melted was his heart at the remembrance of his Lord's passion." We follow from that hour of unveiling at the wayside sanctuary a traveller whose heart is pierced by love, whose thoughts are melted into the adoration of a Crucified Redeemer, whose feet will bleed upon the road that carries him nearer and nearer to the sufferings of his Lord. Here are the first stigmata, the stigmata of the wounded heart in its crucible of love.

Francis felt that immediate action was now a necessity. He went to a neighbouring town, sold some cloth, brought the proceeds to the priest at San Damiano, and begged to be allowed to live there. The priest granted the request, but most prudently declined the money, which Francis flung upon a window-sill in the Church.

Peter Bernardone missed his cloth, and missed his son, and tracked the latter to San Damiano. Francis was not yet delivered from the fear of man, and he hid from his enraged father in a secret retreat, to which one of his mother's household—the only one in the secret—brought daily supplies of food. So quickly do we betray the best moments of our lives ! Yet the courage that has ebbed comes back in a new tide of resolution. Francis used the hours of fear to kill fear. Casting aside his last shreds of cowardice, he entered Assisi in the guise of a beggar to seek his daily bread. He was terribly emaciated, bearing marks both in body and mind of the soul's relentless warfare ; the very children shrieked " madman " after him in the streets, even as we have seen the mentally afflicted persecuted and made sport of in our own streets. Where now is the palace of his dreams, where the glittering weapons of his knighthood, where the mailed ranks of his followers ? In God's keeping, good citizens of Assisi, who watch that day from many a vantage point the strange spectacle that enlivens their quiet streets.

Peter Bernardone came to his shop door to see what was astir. In abandonment of grief and rage he recognised his son. He sprang at him, dragged him into his house, and locked

him securely in a dark cellar. Here then is our hero in a most unheroic plight—a man of twenty-five locked away in disgrace as a misbehaving schoolboy might be. Alas for Francis! Alas for Peter Bernardone! Alas for the Lady Pica mourning in anguish for the alienation of her husband and her son!

It was soon necessary for Peter to go off on a journey, and then Pica gathered all the resources of her love, and besought Francis to find some middle way, by which, while serving God and the poor, he might yet meet his father's wishes. Gently Francis insisted that he was called of Christ to a special mission: no middle path was open to him who followed his Saviour. Gravely and sadly his lady mother accepted the inevitable, unlocked the prison-room, and bade him go free. It was a moment so charged with beauty and sorrow and renunciation, that the very thought of it lays on the imagination a sacred awe. We feel then as the Roman poet felt, when he wrote of the tears in mortal things. And we hear as an echo from an older story of a mother's renunciation these words:—"Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also."

When Peter Bernardone returned to Assisi, his heart was filled with black rage to find his son gone. It is said that he struck his gentle

wife ; in that blow we see the proud, ambitious man in a sombre light that alienates any sympathy that we have felt for him in his defeated hopes.

We should need to know a great deal more than we do of the share Francis had in the cloth-merchant's business, before we could say what title he had to that money still lying unclaimed in the window of the Church of San Damiano. Peter Bernardone now laid claim to it before the civil authorities. They, timid of a conflict with the Church, referred the matter to the Bishop's Court. And there, with a horrible publicity, the affair between Francis and his father had an end. Francis gave back the money, and then, refusing to be beholden to his father even for the clothes he wore, stripped himself naked, and stepping forth to the door of the Bishop's Palace, cried to the crowd outside :— "Listen, all of you, and understand. Until now I have called Peter Bernardone my father ; but since I have resolved to be a servant of the Lord, I return him the money as to which he was annoyed, and all the garments I have had from him, wishing henceforth to say, 'Our Father which art in Heaven,' not Father Peter Bernardone."

Remember this was the thirteenth century not the twentieth. Remember we are dealing with

hot Southern blood, not with our self-restrained Northern natures. Yet making all allowances, we cannot excuse Francis in this. Later he was to prove himself a man of cool, practical sense. That day in the square at Assisi he was overwrought, fanatical, even theatrical. Peter and Francis must part. That was written in the law of both their natures. Yet though that parting must come, I cannot admire the doing of it. It is one of the few pages of Franciscan story that give us pain, not pleasure.

Thereafter, Peter Bernardone, when he met his son begging on the streets of Assisi, never passed him without a curse. Francis had a brother, Angelo by name, who must have been a son dear to his father's heart, so scornful was he of the infatuated exile at San Damiano. Chancing to meet in one of the Churches of Assisi on a winter morning, Angelo said with a sneer to his companion, with intent to be overheard :—"Go, ask Francis to sell you some of his sweat." "No," said Francis, "I shall sell it at a much higher price to my God."

In truth Francis was now a labouring man. He rebuilt San Damiano at bitter cost to his strength. He visited the lepers who lived their sad life at the settlement at Santa Maddalena, or under the care of the Cross-Bearers at San

Salvatore. Very pitiful was he to these sorrowful ones, not bringing them help from above, but dwelling with them and binding up their sores. He touched them without fear, and even kissed their wounds. Alas that his kisses had not the healing power which Bonaventura ascribes to them! He set himself to overcome every reluctance, even the fastidious refinement as to food which was the result of his training. Nothing must separate him from the life of poverty.

Yet useful as this calling was, we can still put ourselves in the place of those who looked upon Francis as a simpleton, who was making a dreary failure of his life. He had given up much: but what had he gained? He had failed in many things: in what had he succeeded? He was a lonely, isolated man, who had chosen a path that no one else would think of following. His isolation itself proclaimed the helpless futility of his quarrel with the plain and wholesome ways of ordinary life. One day he would waken to a realization of his own folly and self-will and pride. Then the tragedy would be complete. It was sound reasoning so far as it went, sound on the lips of those who could not see the future. But another Hand than theirs was writing the biography of Francis of Assisi—a Hand Divine.

We cannot escape the conviction, as we trace

from this point forward the unfolding of the life-story of the poor man of Assisi, that Francis is a man of destiny, fashioned of God, not for the life of ordinary men, but for a vocation extra-ordinary and unique, a vocation for which his strange devotion to poverty was the essential qualification.

The first sign that God had something greater for this man to do came at the historic chapel of the Porziuncola—the Chapel of Saint Mary of the Little Portion, to give it for once its full name, so quaint and so prophetic. That little Franciscan Shrine has become a Church within a Church. For over it, and over the neighbouring hut where Francis died, has been built the vast Church which visitors to Assisi know so well. It lies like an outpost in the plain, two miles or so from the fortress town of Assisi, and though its immediate surroundings are barren of historical charm, the Church itself will ever carry in its bosom imperishable thoughts of the saint, and of that first loyal company which set out with him from the Porziuncola to change the world.

There in the little chapel, Francis heard the priest read the words with which Christ sent out the seventy. He took every syllable home to himself in an unquestioning obedience. Henceforth he is one sent to preach. As

one of the old chroniclers has it :—" he was to be henceforth a herald of gospel perfection and an open-air preacher of repentance." It was an open door into a mighty field of service. From that moment Francis is no timid renouncer, no pale negative spirit, but robust and positive with the credentials of a great calling. Now, closing our ears to the malicious chatter of Assisi or to its genuine sympathy with a dislocated life, we begin dimly to surmise that this man is fashioned for God's ends, and that before him is some shining track of service.

The second sign is something that put the seal of human approval on that solitary exile from home and hearth. It was the coming of the first disciple to that strange master. Some poor outcast, we suppose. Some soul scarred with life's bitter injustices? Some wild, fanatical spirit? No, none of these, but the strangest of men to be bitten with the disease of poverty, a rich merchant of Assisi, as mature as Francis was immature, as sober and cautious as Francis was rash and impulsive, a wise, reserved citizen, a pillar of the settled and ordered life of the city. If Francis is one miracle, Bernard of the Five Valleys is a second. This man invited the scorned outcast to sup with him, and after deep converse pressed him to stay the night, for he

wished to surprise the secret of his sanctity. The host caused a bed to be made ready in his own room, in which a lamp was kept burning all night. Francis waited till Bernard seemed to be asleep and then arose and gave himself to prayer ; and as he prayed he said with deep fervour :—" My God and my all ! " And weeping he prayed on till morning, with no other words than these—" My God and my all ! "

A wakeful man that night was Bernard of the Five Valleys, as he watched by the shining of the lamp the face of one who knew the road to the heart of God. In the early dawn he called to Francis, and said to him :—" Brother Francis, I have inwardly resolved to quit the world, and in whatsoever thou mayest command me to follow thee."

Here then is a marvellous thing ! The solitary man is delivered from his solitude, his thought shared, his purpose accepted, his dream understood. Always in all the world when a man or woman cherishes some great hope for humanity, some kindred soul will come and share it. And sometimes the one who comes to partake of that strange adventure of aspiration will be as unlikely a dreamer of dreams as Bernard of the Five Valleys. For life has this deathless element of surprise within it, and there is none who may not hear the challenge of the highest.

CHAPTER III

THE KNIGHTHOOD OF THE PORZIUNCOLA

Francis was slow to accept his first disciple. It was a serious step to involve another in so strange a way of life. "Let us go and consult the Gospels," he said; and off they went to inquire of the great book that lay near the altar in the Church of St. Nicholas. They called for a certain Peter Cathanii, a doctor of law, and together the three friends entered the church. But here a difficulty arose. Francis was no scholar, no more was Bernard, and Peter was more at home in law than Scripture. Not one of them knew where to look for the Divine word that might assist them—a fact that is significant of the ignorance of the New Testament in the centre of the Christian world of the Middle Ages. We who judge all things in the light of the New Testament must, if we are to enter with sympathy into the life of Francis, conceive a Christian Society existing in almost complete independence of the Four Gospels. The strength of Francis lay in his return to the words of

Christ, so that this morning in the Church of St. Nicholas is a symbol, as it were, of his whole life and its significance. The weakness of Francis was in this, that he never understood the primitive revelation in the balance of its teaching, but received it in isolated fragments—a weakness also typified by the events of that memorable morning.

The three seekers took this way out of their difficulty. Francis knelt and prayed God to give them His guidance. Then naming the name of the Lord Jesus, he opened the Book three times at random. At the first opening he saw these words : " If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor." At the second opening the passage ran : " Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." At the third opening the words were : " Ye shall take nothing for the journey."

The effect of the three counsels was decisive. Francis bade Bernard follow the Words of the Lord, and act out in obedience what he had heard, the rule of their future life together. Then, characteristically, he broke into fervent praise of Him who had stooped to point out to His poor servants the Gospel way.

A few days later—it was the sixteenth day of

April in the year 1209—behold a strange spectacle for all Assisi to gaze at with wonder! For here in the Square of St. George is that rich merchant Bernard, with armfuls of gold and silver, the proceeds of the sale of all he had; and here by his side is Francis in high spirits and singing praises to God. Here while the eyes of the rich gaped with dismay, and the hands of the poor clutched with greed, here are Bernard and Francis literally causing money to have wings and fly. We know not the names of the poor who went to their homes that day as men that dream. But we know the name of Priest Sylvester, who once upon a time had given Francis stones for nothing to rebuild San Damiano, and now in this fairyland, in which Bernard and Francis are the good fairies, thinks well to have his share of the golden gifts. With four handfuls of gold did Francis endow him. "Art satisfied, friend?" he asked; and Sylvester took his payment and slunk away, not without ridicule. Mark the man as with the flush of shame on his cheek he hides himself in the crowd. Mark him well, for we shall see him again.

Now there are three companions, Francis and Bernard and Peter. A week later there is a fourth. As Francis is walking in the woods a

peasant runs forward and kneels at his feet, saying : " Brother Francis, I want to be with you for the love of God."

Class feeling rests heavily enough on the Italy of the thirteenth century, but there is none of it left in Francis. Taking Giles by the hand, he leads him to Bernard with this simple word of introduction : " See what a good brother the Lord has sent us." Francis was by no means infallible in his judgment of men. But here he spoke truly. Giles was, indeed, a good brother, a precious gift. A man of native originality and force of mind, with an incurable zest for work allied with a deep spirit of meditation, he fought as stout a fight as man may wish against the powers of evil. The time came when men flocked from far and near to some lonely hermitage to hear the wisdom of Brother Giles.

At the end of that beautiful book, " The Little Flowers of St. Francis," which is the most familiar part of the Franciscan literature to English readers, we usually find a collection of the sayings of Brother Giles. In this connection we may remember Sabatier's judgment on " The Little Flowers," and the accompanying Legends, which are considerably later in date than the early records, that they had their origin not in

the more imposing monasteries of the Order, but in the remote hermitages and in the homes of the people. They thus preserve, in spite of their fantastic inventions, a flavour of something truly primitive and Franciscan. With a delicate penetration they discern and conserve the very essence of that early consecration to an ideal of the heart, which brought warmth and joy and wonder into the life of poverty and into the service of God and man.

Many of the disciples of Francis live in these later legends, who are little more than names in the early story. But here we are concerned with the historical origins of the great movement, and, at cost of sacrificing much that is picturesque, we must keep to our task. In truth, the bare record is sufficiently romantic, and the heart lingers gladly on these first four companions living lovingly and simply together, nor dreaming as yet whereunto their movement must grow. Francis, Bernard, Peter, Giles, what men they were, and what rich converse they had in as pure and high a friendship as men ever enjoyed on this earth!

Most lives of Francis make too little of Bernard, but not so Francis himself. He was wont to call Bernard the very founder of the Order, since by giving his all to the poor he had

set the great example, and had offered himself bare of all possessions to the army of the Crucified One. It is good to think of the words which Bernard spoke when he lay dying: "Dearest brothers, I will not speak to you many words, but wish you to think of this, that the state of life which hath been mine you still have as yours, and that what befalleth me now will in the future befall you. And I find this in my mind, that for a thousand worlds like unto this I would not have done other than serve our Lord Jesus Christ. And for every fault that I have committed I accuse myself before my Divine Saviour, my Lord Jesus Christ, and before you. I pray you, brothers of mine most beloved, that ye love one another."

But we cannot linger with this little company of four, for already others are hastening to join their number. Who should present himself one day to find a place in the first twelve—who are as famous in Franciscan story and legend as the knights of Arthur's Round Table—but Priest Sylvester, whom we saw slinking off into the crowd with some of Bernard's money in his hands. There is this to be said for Sylvester, that he was a priest of blameless life, and of a great zeal for the Church. Nor was he slow to make the decisive choice. Legend says

that he dreamed a dream, three nights in succession, of a great Cross that filled the earth, and of a dragon which fled from the Cross. It may have been so. But it is a fact of life, that when a man is humiliated in his own eyes by some crass and stupid action that he has done before the eyes of men, he begins to see himself with the veils of self-delusion stripped away. Out of that revelation may come great resolves for the future. So with Priest Sylvester. Three days he endured the taunts of his companions. Three nights he twisted on his bed, unable to forgive himself or to forget his humiliation. Then he betook himself straight to Francis, and found peace.

One after another they come, these first disciples, till their number is completed by that gentle and courteous knight, Angelo Tancredi.

It was at Rieti that Francis met and claimed him. As though long familiar with him, he called him by his name, and bade him join the ranks of poverty. He said : " Angelo, long enough hast thou worn thy sword and thy belt. The time has come for thee to have a thick cord instead of thy belt ; the Cross of Jesus instead of thy sword ; mud and dust on thy feet instead of thy spurs. Follow me, therefore, and of thee I will make a soldier of Jesus Christ." Angelo

was ready, by the inner preparation of the Spirit, for that hard call, and gladly changed the order of his knighthood ; while Francis, dreaming still of following his Saviour in all things, rejoiced to have found his twelve. Alas, this company had its traitor too, in the person of John of the Chapel, who had to be expelled from the order. His place was not left vacant, and the filling of it linked the Franciscan movement for the first time to a far-off island in the Northern sea. For at Rome, Francis, preaching with the flame of the Holy Spirit's victorious power upon his lips, took captive the surrendered will of a certain Englishman, William by name, who became one of the twelve.

The little band had their headquarters at the Chapel of the Porziuncola. They went forth two and two, after New Testament custom, to preach and teach. They worked where they could get work. Otherwise they thought it no shame to beg. Money they refused to accept.

It was the badge of that which they had forsaken and renounced. At first they met with an intense derision, which they invited by their squalid dress—the shapeless brown or grey robe bound with a cord. Take, for example, the reception that Bernard of the Five Valleys met with in the city of Bologna : " When the street

boys saw him in his garb so strange and wretched, they began to insult him, as though he were a witless man. But Brother Bernard bore these insults not only with patience but even with the utmost joy. For because he was truly a disciple of Christ, who was despised and rejected of men, for the love of Him he went and stood in the market-place of the city, with the intent that he might be the more reviled. While he was sitting there many boys and men gathered around him. They snatched at his hood, some from behind, and others in front of him. Some threw dust at him ; others stones. Some pushed him heavily one way, some another."

Thinking of such a scene, and it is told so vividly that we see every push and blow, and hear every coarse reviling word, we understand what one of the early chroniclers meant when he said that being " called by the Lord from the Cross and to the Cross, both Francis and his first companions seemed and were as men crucified."

And yet the characteristic of those early days was a simple gaiety. There was song, and joyous comradeship, and long days on the open road, and nights beneath the shining of the stars. There was love in their hearts, and God's beauty of creation around them. And like Bunyan's pilgrim they were as men who had

shaken off an intolerable burden at the Cross, and now went glad and free on their Lord's errands of charity and hope. For they seemed to have everything, because they had kept nothing. Out of the heart of Francis joy bubbled, as water out of some clear spring. Yet it was such joy as held the world's sorrow in its heart, and Christ's sorrow, and sometimes it would end in tears. Such joy reminds us of Robert Browning's lines in "Balaustion's Adventure," descriptive of Herakles :

> "Gladness be with thee, Helper of our World!
> I think this is the authentic sign and seal
> Of Godship, that it ever waxes glad,
> And more glad, until gladness blossoms, bursts
> Into a rage to suffer for mankind,
> And recommence at sorrow."

Of such a spirit was Francis of Assisi. Yet his sorrow was a retired and secret thing. Spiritual gladness before the world he enjoined as a sacred duty upon his followers both by precept and example. The strangest thing about the joy of Francis has yet to be told. It was joy without laughter. Perhaps laughter in that old world meant something other and different than we know to-day, something merely ribald, or mocking and derisive. The prohibition of laughter is hard to reconcile with

something of which we have much evidence, the element of pure comedy that entered into that strange wandering life of Francis and his comrades. The name by which they loved to be called has been translated into English as "God's little funny men."

In a certain Brother Juniper, whom they all loved, they had a perpetual fountain of amusement. Sister Clare, who has not yet come into our story, called Juniper "The Plaything of God."

What could one make of a man who, when the people of Rome came out to meet him and to do him honour, was found at one end of a plank gravely see-sawing with two children who faced him at the other end?

Or what are we to say of that delightful little comedy of the mess of pottage? Juniper had been severely reproved by a harsh superior for a serious indiscretion. A little later, enter to the Superior Juniper with a steaming dish.

"Your throat was sore, sir, when you censured me," he said to his astonished chief. "I have made this as a remedy for it." The angry superior ordered him to be off, and his dish with him. Much puzzled the good Juniper persisted. But when at last he saw that it was useless, he cried: "Then, if you will not partake I ask

this boon of thee : hold the candle, and I myself will eat it." What ending could there be after such simplicity ? The superior was won over, and sitting down shared the dish with Juniper.

But we should be wrong to suppose that this artlessness was the peculiar possession of Brother Juniper. There was an amazing dose of it in the composition of Francis himself. See him with Brother Masseo on a journey. They come to cross-roads, one leading to Florence, another to Arezzo, a third to Siena. Masseo who is walking in front calls back : " Father, by which way are we to go ? " " By that which God shall will," came the reply. " But how can we know the will of God ? " " By the sign I will show thee," answered Francis ; " wherefore by the merit of holy obedience I command thee that in the cross-roads where thou art now standing thou turn round and round, as children do, and cease not turning till I tell thee." Masseo did as he was told, whilst Francis prayed to be led as God willed. Suddenly Francis cried out : " Stand still and tell me towards what quarter thy face is now turned ? " Masseo replied : " Towards Siena." " That is the way," said Francis, " that God would have us go." At Siena they found a fierce feud raging, which ceased after Francis had preached to the people

in the open air, and besought them to live at peace. Masseo, it may be observed, was more than a little indignant that Francis should have used him as a spinning-top at the cross-roads, but so manifest was God's blessing on the result that he was not long in forgiving his master, and rejoicing in his works and ways.

On this side of the nature of Francis we may place his famous sermon to the birds, and that mysterious affinity that bound him to all the lower creation. Here his love of the fanciful and the grotesque received a justification in a kind of new sense, through which nature and her secrets became to him an open book.

With this mysterious, and gentle, and daring personality at their head, the little company of dedicated men carried from village to village, and city to city, a new breath of simplicity and religion, teaching men and women that God was not so very far away after all; that He might still be found in the way of Christ, and that in the finding was great joy. There were many extravagances in their conduct, but it has been justly said that the age needed a shock. Perhaps nothing less than the startling words and ways of the little Poor Man would have stirred the world to that great outburst of zeal and repentance which it is the undying glory of Francis and

his companions to have originated and sustained. Great things did their leader accomplish for many lands, but greatest work of all he wrought in the hearts of those nearest to him. There has come down to us through the centuries the expression of their love and gratitude to their dear Master: "Thy life has been for us a continual light, and thy words have been torches for ever burning and for ever lighting us along the way of the Cross, to evangelic perfection, to the love and the imitation of the most sweet Crucified One."

CHAPTER IV

FRANCIS MEETS THE POPE AND THE SULTAN

The Bishop of Assisi sent for Francis one day, and expostulated with him on his refusal to own property. He ought to reconsider so extreme a step. What was to happen to him and to his followers, if the people declined to feed them any longer? Must they die of starvation? And how could they hold together and enjoy corporate life without a roof to cover them? Francis made a shrewd reply, urging that the keeping of property involved arms and feuds and law-suits, and prevented men from loving God and their neighbour. The Bishop had had more than his own share of trouble in feuds and law-suits connected with the property of his see, and he thought it well to say no more on that point.

But though he had silenced the Bishop, Francis felt his liberty threatened, and it seems probable that in this incident lies the first germ of his bold determination to seek an authority for his way of life which even his Bishop could not challenge. An additional incentive to go to Rome lay in the completion of his apostolic band.

Now that they reproduced in number the similitude of the twelve, it was high time that they had a commission as authentic. Behold them, then, on the road to Rome, strong in faith and hope and love, feeling their brotherhood and their freedom so wonderful a thing, that God, they were sure, must have other joyful surprises waiting for them just out of sight.

The world was to be changed by these men, and by the new inspiration communicated by them to the ministry of preaching; yet had we seen them on the road we had, perhaps, set them down as a band of idle beggars, of whom the Church and the country had been better rid. Even looking back to-day, aware of their achievements, we may be tempted to think that they have no ministry to us or to our generation. A surprising number to-day turn from the richly storied past, unable to spare a thought from the present, or to find any fruit on the long laden branches of the deep-rooted tree of human history. "Men do mightily wrong themselves," wrote the English mystic, Thomas Traherne, "When they refuse to be present in all ages; and neglect to see the beauty of all kingdoms . . . and busy themselves only with pots and cups and things at home, or shops and trades and things in the street: but do not live to God mani-

festing Himself in all the world, nor care to see and be present with Him in all the glory of His eternal Kingdom. By seeing the Saints of all ages we are present with them: by being present with them become too great for our own age and near to our Saviour."

Traherne is right. And Francis proves him so. To see this Saint and be present with him is to become too great for our own age and to be drawn nearer to the Saviour. Therefore, with observant eyes let us follow him by the quiet roads of Umbria and the Campagna till he and his companions are jostled and stared at in the narrow, crowded streets of mediæval Rome. They go singing at first, but as they draw near to the Eternal City they fall silent, and question what awaits them there among the great ones of the earth.

Bernard commands the expedition, for Francis would have it that another should be chosen leader in his stead. And so they went towards Rome, and towards the Lateran Palace, where one who knew not of their coming dreamed of other instruments of world-conquest than the Poor Knight of Poverty.

The meeting of Pope Innocent III and Francis of Assisi is one of the most significant historical events of the thirteenth century. They were both

great men, both religious to the core of their nature, both passionately eager for reform. It was Innocent who two years before this meeting had laid England under that terrible interdict, which the folly of bad King John provoked but scarcely justified. Yet none can deny the man's greatness and vision and patient strength, exerted for the good of the Church and for its reformation from a thousand corruptions. If Francis was to bow his free spirit to the yoke, he could have found none keener to further his aims than the ruler of men who sat in the Papal Chair. But their acquaintance had a bad beginning.

Innocent, the Pope, was pacing a corridor of the Lateran Palace, deep in his far-flung schemes for the Church's purification and aggrandizement, when that other innocent, Francis, flung himself in his way. He had reduced his Rule to writing before leaving Assisi, and carried the precious document with him for the Pope's approval. Innocent III, thinking not unnaturally that he was dealing with a madman, and startled out of polite speech by the suddenness of this strange apparition, suggested to Francis that he should take himself out of his sight with all speed and roll himself in the mire with the pigs. If Popes could see the future! To-day the successor of Innocent is suspected of wishing to

break the bounds of the Vatican that he may kneel, on the seven hundredth anniversary of his death, at the tomb of Francis at Assisi. And though this intention to break with long custom is denied, no one would challenge the adequacy of the motive. So far has Francis travelled from the mire and the pigs !

Francis soon found a strong protector in one of the cardinals, renewed his plea to the Pope, was successful in his mission, and returned well satisfied. None the less this was the end of the pure, unfettered, Franciscan movement. From that time onward invisible chains were round the feet of Francis and his knights of poverty. Rome tolerates much within her fold, but she also transforms ; Francis realized it later in bitterness of spirit.

Meanwhile he lived in the sunshine. He had already had a vision of the roads of Europe thronged with men hastening to join his Order, French and Spaniards and English and Germans, speaking strange tongues, yet one in the longing to follow Christ. Now he began to see the dream fashion its fulfilment in the world of the real. His influence became supreme in Assisi. Sunday by Sunday he preached in the Cathedral with a love and a simplicity and a pleading that drew the souls of his hearers nearer to heavenly things.

There rises to the memory an April Sunday evening in the Cathedral of Fiesole, and a young Franciscan monk preaching with all his heart and soul, with quick play of gesture and expression, with turbulent flow of language, while around the people stood or knelt on the bare stone floor. Was it so that Francis preached? Was is so that Clare listened?

It was probably at this time, and in preparation for these sermons, that Francis became a student of the Bible. Professor Paul Sabatier has noticed, in an article published recently, two great omissions in all lives of Francis, including his own celebrated life of the Saint. The first of these oversights concerns the devotion of St. Francis to the Bible. At one time, as we have seen already, Francis was sufficiently ignorant even of the Gospels, but now and afterwards he uses the Bible with knowledge and understanding.

The second omission is the failure of the biographers of Francis to realize the mortal stroke that he struck at heresy, and especially at the insidious yet plausible heresy of the Catharini, which was strong and had influential adherents in Assisi itself. The Church had taken the wrong way with the heretics, the way of argument and the way of persecution. Francis was to confront and overcome heresy by the

example of holy lives lived in the shelter of the Church's worship, enlightened by the Church's God-given revelation, and nourished by the Church's supernatural life. It was of this, we may be sure, that he preached at Assisi, in those days when he drew to him the hearts of his own people.

But with it all there was much wayfaring and lengthening journeys that sought farther and farther afield for the lost sheep of Christ's flock. St. Francis might have spoken the very words that Mr. Laurence Housman puts in his mouth in his play "The Builders": "Who gives more joy than a cobbler? He is the means by which we go, making the way easy; he saves us from stones and thorns, from the fangs of serpents, and from frost-bite. By his aid we make long journeys, seeing the world, and the wonder of it: Rome and the Holy Land, and churches where priests say Mass; to cities also, and men's houses, making us become friends. Thus are we brought together in understanding and fellowship, which from the beginning was God's will concerning us. See, then, how good and joyful a thing it is to be a cobbler! And he that gives joy on earth gives joy in heaven."

So Francis and his friends wandered on the broad highway of life. Nor did they fear to plan far-distant expeditions beyond the limits of Italy

or even of Europe. Francis designed to go himself to Morocco and to the Holy Land. Though thwarted at first in both projects, he lived to fulfil his venturesome desire to preach the gospel to the Saracens. The Christian world was at that time in the throes of the Crusades. It hurt the pride of Christian princes and prelates that the Infidel should hold the sacred places in Palestine. Yet though Francis was a crusader at heart, he fashioned his zeal after a different pattern from that of most of his contemporaries. They wished to kill and extirpate the wicked Moslem to the glory of God. Francis, who had learned of Christ, dreamed not of killing them but of saving them from their errors ; not of hating them, but of loving them in the spirit of his Saviour.

Fired with as pure a zeal as that which has lived in the heart of any of the Church's glorious company of missionaries, Francis sailed, in the summer of the year 1219, accompanied by a band of twelve, to win the Moslem world for Christ. He left many adherents of his cause, and many unsolved problems, behind him in Europe ; for the number of his followers was already very great. We know that no less than five thousand brothers were present at the Chapter held in that year. To such a host the little band of faith and poverty had grown in ten years. The interests

of the Order, in the absence of their leader, were entrusted to two Vicars-General, Brother Matthew of Narni and Brother Gregory of Naples, the former to be resident at the Porziuncola, and receive and train the new recruits, the latter to travel here and there as need arose. The very unfamiliarity of their names warns us how far we have already travelled from the little band of comrades who sang their way from Assisi to Rome less than ten years before. Once in those early days, in prophetic mood, Francis had spoken thus : " My comrades, in these first days that we live together it is like men eating apples all sweet and wholesome ; but wait a little and the apples given to us will not all be wholesome and sweet. And at last some will be so excessively bitter that our teeth will be set on edge, though their outward appearance will be as of fruit ripe and full of juice."

The fulfilment of that sad word was already come, and it may be that Francis went to the East seeking the crown of martyrdom, and counting it not only all joy, if he should so be called to lay down his life, but also a better thing for the Order whose guidance was fast slipping from his hands.

Francis landed in Egypt in the year 1219, and joined the Army of the Crusaders which was lying

before Damietta. "We saw Brother Francis, the Founder of the Order of Friars Minor, arrive," wrote the Bishop of Acre; "he was a simple unlearned man, but very gracious, and beloved by God as well as by men."

Francis found much to vex his soul in the ranks of the so-called Christian army, and he longed, in spite of official disapprobation, to get away from it and visit the Sultan. With, or without, permission he, and one of his brothers, escaped from the lines of the Crusaders, and turned their faces towards the camp of the Saracens. Of all the heart-moving associations that the 23rd Psalm has gathered in the long ages of its use, few can surpass for romance its presence on the lips of St. Francis and Brother Illuminato as they essayed the perilous crossing between one army and the other. Unquestionably they expected death. With equal certainty it may be said that they were as calm and tranquil as if the sand of the desert beneath their feet had been the sweet lanes below Assisi, or the mountain tracks above it. For this is what they are chanting: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with

oil ; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life ; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

In such superb lordship over fear, in such quietude of trust in the Good Shepherd, in such serene faith, they encountered the Arab outposts, and were with every indignity and cruelty made prisoners and dragged before one superior officer after another. Francis met them all with one calm word : " I am a Christian, take me to your lord." And by the Divine Shepherding, on which they had cast themselves, they came at last to the presence of Malek Kamil, a ruler by no means deficient in greatness of mind and heart. With that engaging simplicity of his Francis assured the Sultan that they brought him a message from God. They came to convince him that he was lost, unless he made submission to the truth : " If you will listen to us and hear us, we will demonstrate to you, before the wisest of your land, that you are all lost." The wisest men were accordingly sent for, and asked for their advice. They gave it without hesitation. Let the Sultan cut off the heads of the two Christians, and do it quickly. The Sultan dismissed his advisers, and then turning to his captives said : " They have ordered me by Mahomet and by the law to have your heads cut off. For this the

law commands ; but I will disobey the commandment. For otherwise I should render you a poor reward for having dared death to save my soul."

On subsequent occasions Francis was received in audience by the Eastern monarch, who even invited him to remain at his court. Francis expressed his willingness to stay, if thereby the Sultan and his followers would learn obedience to Christ. He challenged the Sultan, if he wanted a proof of the superiority of Christ over Mahomet, to kindle a great fire into which Francis and the Moslem priests would enter for the judgment of the flames. The Sultan confessed that none of his priests would be willing to accept the ordeal. Francis then offered to enter the fire alone : if he were destroyed it would be a proof of his sins ; if he survived let the Sultan own Christ as God and Saviour.

Poor Francis was a forgetful man that day. Could he have so spoken, if he had remembered One who said : "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" ?

The Sultan sensibly refused to countenance this ordeal by fire. He offered Francis lavish gifts. They were refused ; and the two adventurers of faith returned in safety to the lines of the Crusaders.

Those to whom they returned listened with astonishment and admiration to the story of that strange experience. Francis was a seven days'

wonder in the Christian army, and perhaps something more. An old Churchman who was there has left us a record of how one after another of his clergy forsook him to join the Poor Man of Assisi. Francis himself pressed on to the Holy Land and the Holy Places, though this episode of his life is veiled in considerable obscurity. On his return to Acre he learned of the first martyrdoms of his Order—those of the five friars who perished in Morocco, whose devotion unto death gained for Francis one of his greatest recruits, Anthony of Padua. Francis gloried in the heroism of the martyred dead, and probably envied them their home-coming. But the next news that reached him from Europe was of a nature almost to break his heart. Under the rule of the Vicars-General the affairs of the Order had reached breaking-point. Brother Stephen had escaped secretly to search for Francis and to bring him home. Only by his coming could terrible evils be averted. Francis learned with dismay that new laws had been made for the brothers in his absence. He determined to return at once with Peter Cathanii, Cæsar of Speyer, and Brother Elias, the Minister Provincial of Syria. Strange fate that going to encounter so many woes, he should bring with him his greatest sorrow—Brother Elias.

CHAPTER V

THE SECOND AND THIRD ORDERS

Thus far we have followed the straight line of the history of Francis and his Order. Now we must take a wider survey and ask ourselves what other people were thinking of this curious movement. How did it affect the womanhood of Assisi and of Italy? How did it affect plain folk busy in their homes with the ordinary duties of life, and toilers in field and workshop and market-place? The answer to these two questions lies in the history of the Second and Third Orders, which though founded at different times have an affinity for one another that justifies the treatment of them in one chapter.

The Second Order, like the first, had its origin in one romantic personality. It needs an effort to think of Clare apart from Francis and his influence over her; and hence there has been a tendency to overlook the native strength, originality and valour of Clare's womanhood. Even had Francis not existed, Clare would have left an indelible mark on the religious history of her

age. She is not a satellite of Francis but an independent, light-giving, radiant personality. It may be that her spiritual force, instead of being enhanced, was in a measure eclipsed when Francis shut her up in San Damiano. There were other Orders of consecrated womanhood already in the world, which would have yielded her a loftier lighthouse in which to shelter the great lantern of her clear spirit. For she could not be the counterpart of St. Francis in the world of women. No such possibility was open to womanhood in the Middle Ages. The Franciscan ideal was one of free and joyous movement in a world varied and beautiful, not a cloistered virtue locked away behind bars. When Francis gave to Clare the jewel of his ideal, he enfolded it in too many wrappings. Or to put it otherwise, while Francis was a bird of freedom, Clare was caged and a prisoner. That she sang so sweet a song in her cage is her glory. That she taught so many others to sing it there is her praise.

Now let the facts speak for themselves. To a noble family in the neighbourhood of Assisi was born on the 16th day of July, 1194, a daughter who was prophetically named Clare, "the shining one." Her family, the Scifi, held feudal rule in Sasso Rosso, a castle on the slopes of Monte Subasio. Her mother, Ortolana, a most devout

woman of noble birth, was dead when, at seventeen years of age, Clare faced the crisis of her young life. Perhaps the absence of a mother's love and guidance explains much, and excuses much, of the strange adventure by which Clare found her heart's desire. Family pressure of father and brothers was strongly urging marriage upon one whose soul was devoured with hunger for the conventual life. But there is evidence that Clare could hold her own with the men-folk of her home ; and her path seemed tending towards some established and powerful sisterhood, to which the daughter of a noble house might go freely and honourably.

It was at this point that the orbits of Francis and Clare crossed. Early in 1212 Francis was preaching in the Cathedral of Assisi and all the city was at his feet. We have seen him as a preacher already ; but here is the valuable testimony of one who heard him eight years later at Bologna :

" I, Thomas, a citizen of Spalato, and Archdeacon of the Cathedral Church there, in the year 1220, on the day of the Assumption, saw St. Francis preaching in the open square before the Little Palace, where well nigh the whole population had gathered. This was the subject of his opening words :—Angels, men, demons. Concerning these rational spirits he spoke so

well and so accurately, that many learned men who were present were roused to great wonder at hearing such a discourse from one who was not a scholar. Neither did he follow the accepted way of preaching, but was more like one appealing to the hearts of the people. The whole tenor of his words aimed at the quenching of enmities and the securing of reformation through treaties of peace. His dress was mean, his personal appearance contemptible, his face uncomely, but God gave his words such power that many of noble rank, whose inhuman passions had drenched the land in blood, were led into the ways of peace and concord. In truth the devotion that he evoked was so strong and so widespread, that men and women crowded excitedly round him. The one who could even touch the hem of his garment deemed himself blessed."

Imagine such a preacher, younger and happier in those days when Clare heard him, and less concerned then with civil wars and tumults than with the unending strife within the human heart—imagine such a preacher, and that sensitive, unworldly girl of seventeen listening with a concentrated passion of heart, seeing her own visions and idealisms confirmed and beautified in the words of the Poverello. Of most preaching, and of most hearing, there may be but little harvest,

but of the seed sown in those Lenten discourses in Assisi there was to grow that golden grain which is gathered into the granaries of God.

Between Clare and Francis there was a link. One of the most high-born of the followers of Francis was Brother Ruffino, who with Leo and Angelo formed the band of "The Three Companions," the friends who united to write a famous early legend of the Saint. This Ruffino was cousin to Clare, and doubtless it was through him that Francis and Clare met. All that we know of the meeting is that it was Francis who sought it. He had soon discerned in that rapt face in his Cathedral congregation the window from which looked out a soul of surpassing grace and beauty.

The result was a startling one to the city of Assisi, and judgment upon it to-day is sharply divided. On the night of Palm Sunday, Clare escaped from her home accompanied by an older kinswoman, a sister of her mother. They broke their way out of a disused and blocked-up postern gate that opened on the hillside. They fled straight to the Porziuncola where Francis and the brethren were awaiting them. And there in the low-pitched chapel, by the light of the flaring torches, Clare made her vows while Francis cut off her long hair and bestowed on her the habit of his Order.

In the morning she was escorted to the charge of the nuns of San Paolo, a Benedictine convent at Bastia, from which her relatives made a vain attempt to remove her. After a few days of rest, following the fierce strain of her spiritual decision, Clare passed to the Convent of Sant' Angelo, in the neighbourhood of Assisi. And now a second shock, a second complication ! A fortnight after Clare's flight, Agnes, her younger sister, but fifteen years of age, eluded the vigilance of her family and threw in her lot with Clare at Sant' Angelo. This time the infuriated men of the house of Scifi were not to be denied. They broke into the chapel, where Clare and Agnes had taken refuge, and after their pleading had failed, seized Agnes, and dragged her off with them. In some way, which legend has thoroughly concealed under a mass of imaginative fiction, Agnes was restored to her beloved Clare, for whom she cherished a life-long adoration. Later the sisters were housed at San Damiano, where Clare founded and guided the Second Order of St. Francis, the Poor Clares. For seven years Agnes shared this quiet life. Then against her will she became Abbess of a distant convent. For thirty years she did not see her sister, till Clare summoned her to her death-bed. Oh, the ruthlessness of monasticism and conventual life

towards the simple loyalties and family affections of the human heart!

No one who writes this story can evade the question of its rights and wrongs, as they affect the parts played in these strange transactions by Francis and by Clare. But it is a pity that the issues are so often confused by the failure to distinguish the manner of Clare's self-dedication from that decisive step itself. Mr. Chesterton is not guiltless in this respect in his defence of Francis and Clare against the strictures of Mrs. Oliphant. The latter did not think that any one could be found in her time to "approve the conduct of any ecclesiastic who encouraged or aided a young girl of seventeen to escape from her father's house, even for the holy purpose of devoting herself to God in a convent." Yet Father Cuthbert, in his brilliant life of St. Francis, and Mr. Chesterton both signify unshadowed approval, both of them hiding the unworthiness of the manner in the piety of the object of Clare's flight. At the point where the charities of home life and the calls of religious vocation meet, there is, perhaps, a radical divergence in the Protestant and Roman Catholic judgment of values. Through centuries of different education, and through the variation of emphasis laid on certain elements of life, a gulf has widened which

seems almost impassable. Let it suffice, then, to say that the ethical judgment that has been fashioned by the Spirit of the Reformation will not readily be reconciled to Clare's midnight flight, nor to the cruel way that human affection was counted negligible in that proud home at Assisi, from which Clare and Agnes fled. We feel the sanctity of home life to be too sacred for such ruthless and high-handed dealing with parental love ; while at the same time we realize that the consciences of Clare and Francis were nurtured on a different order of ideas than ours, so that both in their romantic actions, on that night of destiny, followed the light as they saw it.

The spiritual tie that bound Francis and Clare together is one of the most beautiful and sacred things in the records of human friendship. If a romancer had invented the story of these two questing souls no one would have believed it ; and the tale of that imperishable comradeship, as it actually existed, is one of the distinctive interests of the biography of St. Francis. Clare is discerned as a radiant, wonderful influence in the life of the Poverello ; and no cloud of earth ever dimmed that high spiritual passion with which—apart yet not apart—they loved and followed Christ along the way of self-denial. There was some fellowship between the community of the

Porziuncola and the sisterhood at San Damiano ; but it was of a rare and guarded kind. Clare and her sisters lived lives of prayer and charity within the strict limits of their narrow home, where in a true Franciscan spirit they made their little garden a paradise. There Clare cultivated her three favourite flowers, the lily for purity, the rose for love, the violet for humility. We may still see Clare's garden at San Damiano, as we can see the thornless roses at the Porziuncola, but perhaps that love of nature that Francis and Clare brought to a perfection of intimacy may be found to linger most exquisitely in some of the little monasteries that carry on the traditions of their Orders. Memory brings back to me the little cloister garden at Fiesole, where the elusive Franciscan spirit has been captured and revealed in the friendship of the flowers that Francis loved and Clare tended. In such peaceful scenes, guarded from rough contact with the world, guided and blessed by the Divine Hand, filled with holy thoughts of prayer and sacrifice, and meditating on the love of Jesus, Clare lived her honoured and tranquil life. We shall see later how she ministered to Francis in his hour of need. She survived him by twenty-four years ; ever seeking to guard his rule, against the alien obligations imposed upon her by her

ecclesiastical rulers, and cherishing the ideal of poverty with a simple and enduring faithfulness. There are few incidents to be recorded of those peaceful years. They lack the dramatic intensity, the storm and stress, the far journeyings, that stud the story of the Poverello. But as Maeterlinck reminds us in "Wisdom and Destiny," "there is less need of heroic hours in a beautiful life, than of weeks that are grave and uniform and pure."

In the thirteenth century life offered few choices to a woman of rank. If she was averse from marriage, there was only the convent and the enclosed existence thereby entailed. Not for centuries to come would the Church welcome a more energetic and untrammelled vocation. And still more remote was the day of a larger liberty. Unvexed by hopes that were not yet born, Clare lived a life that yielded every thought and affection to God. Let her epitaph be the words of Thomas of Celano, of which no English translation would convey the grace: "Clara nomine, vita clarior, clarissima moribus."

The Third Order of St. Francis was founded in the year 1221. The legendary account of it is that a whole village was so carried away by the Saint's message that men, women and children wished to take the road with Francis and live the

life of poverty. The Saint, set this sudden conundrum to solve, formed in a flash the idea of the Third Order, and promised the vagrant villagers that if they would go back to their homes he would provide a modified form of his Rule for them, so that they might carry on the necessary work of life, yet be of the Order of poverty and humility. The legend may be the amplified version of some significant incident, that brought the plans of Francis to a head. But, in truth, only in the very earliest days can the problem have been absent from the mind of the comradeship of sacrifice. Once they became preachers, they were faced with every preacher's perplexity, how to cope with the variety of human experience. What was to be said to married people, Bernard and Giles and Angelo and the rest must have asked when they returned from their first preaching journey? Crowding round Francis, they would ply him with questions. In Perugia was a man who wished to desert his wife and family: would not that be wicked, Brother Francis? In Assisi itself there were husbands and wives who spoke of leaving one another: is it well, brother Francis? In a village by Lake Trasimene the workers were forsaking the fields and the vineyards: who is to do the world's work, little father, if all men become beggars? Those eager

questions were but a phase of a problem as old as Christianity, how to live in the world yet renounce it. The two kingdoms that compete for human allegiance, the kingdom of God's love and the vainglorious world of the senses, are so interwoven and interpenetrated, that a gigantic problem of personal conduct has faced all through the Christian centuries those men and women who seek to live as in God's sight, yet feel twining round them day by day the tentacles of worldliness and selfishness and sin.

Father Cuthbert in his chapter on the Third Order lays stress on earlier efforts to solve this persistent problem. Eight hundred years ago a group of Italians of noble birth were driven from their own land by political troubles, and took refuge in Germany. Forced by the loss of all to reconsider the whole circumstances of possession and enjoyment, they formed themselves into a community of mutual help. They adopted the trade of weaving, and shared their profits. While they married, and lived in their own houses, yet everything they had and did was made to serve a common object. It was a definitely religious movement. They met regularly for worship, and to encourage one another in charity and in the care of the poor and sick, The colony was ultimately restored to Italy, and made the

city of Milan its headquarters. They were called the people who had humbled themselves—the Humiliati. There survives a Rule of this Society, dated in the year 1201. It sets out the imitation of Jesus Christ in His humility and meekness as their leading purpose. They are to be patient in adversity, forgiving to their enemies, doing to others as they would be done by. They were to help the Church by regular contributions, and to give a further free-will offering to the poor. They were to dress simply, care for the sick, bury the dead, live a life of prayer, and partake three times a year of the Holy Sacrament.

It was on such foundations that Francis, consciously or unconsciously, built the Rule of the Third Order. Though he had himself left all to follow Christ, no one ever set a greater value on ordinary life than he did. No one ever had a sounder or more wholesome comprehension of the worth in God's sight of the plain ways of ordinary men, and by a stroke of his strange genius he met the spiritual cravings of men and women who accepted his teachings, but knew, none the less, that their own duty lay in the tasks of home-life and citizenship, and in the fulfilment of obvious services to others. To these Francis said : " Share my joy in your own homes : live for other people while you seem to live as other

people." The rules he gave them were not unlike those of the Humiliati, but the spirit in which they were observed was incomparably more joyous, radiant with the happiness of the discovery that the world is God's world, when once we trample under foot the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life.

A significant rule of the Order was that members must not carry arms, nor take oaths except such as were expressly sanctioned by the Pope. This was a direct blow struck against the feudal oath, and the perpetual warfare that was the curse of the Italian cities and states. By the influence of the Third Order, Francis became the great peace-maker of his age, and a benefactor of all who wished to live in tranquillity. In every respect Francis sought to leaven society with the spirit and example and words of Christ. It is the problem that is still with us. Here is a man who has determined to make money, and to make the enjoyment of it a matter of the selfish happiness of himself and his family. Can he be made to see the sick in the wards of hospitals, and the poor in the slums of great cities, and the long procession of the joyless and the disinherited? Can the man who loves himself be taught to love others, and begin to live a life into which the joy of sacrifice enters?

Whatever be the answer to such questions to-day, it was possible in the time of St. Francis of Assisi. Actually, his first convert for the Third Order was such a man as has been described, a man who wanted wealth and power ; a man who traded in grain, and succeeded in buying up the available supplies, thereby making great profit to himself, great misery to others. He was married so happily that even to this day we know his wife under the grateful name bestowed upon her by her neighbours :—" The Gracious Lady." From the day that they heard Francis preach, husband and wife found that life's surest joy was to feed the hungry, and tend the sick, and care for the forsaken, and follow the steps of Christ. They were the first spoils of the plan of Francis to capture ordinary people, and unlikely people, for a life of higher service and of higher joy. The ideas and practices of the Third Order flowed through Europe as a river of healing, of which some of the greatest and proudest stooped to drink and be cured.

While friars were preaching and Poor Clares were praying, Christ had His witnesses and His followers, a great multitude, in homes where women toiled and children played and sang, and from which men went forth to their work and to their labour until the evening.

CHAPTER VI

O POOR LITTLE MAN, WHY ARE YOU DISTRESSED?

St. Francis returned from Egypt in the summer of 1220 to meet a disquieting situation of division and disloyalty in his Order. Unfortunately, he came with health seriously impaired by the effects of the Eastern climate on a body already irreparably injured by those extreme indignities and austerities which he had inflicted on Brother Body. At an earlier period, when the leader was sending forth his followers two and two into many lands, he had reminded them that they always carried their cell with them. "Brother Body is our cell and the soul is the hermit who dwells within to pray and meditate upon the Lord. Of little use is a cell made with hands if the soul is not at rest in its own cell."

It is strange that the acute mind of St. Francis did not perceive till it was too late the converse of this salutary truth. No monkish error has been more deplorable than the failure to keep the body in habitable repair for that exacting tenant who lives within it. Francis came to

the crisis of his Order with weakened vitality, with nerves racked and torn, with eyesight failing fast, with pain and physical suffering preying upon him, and robbing him of that self-possession which he needed in this hour of momentous action.

The transformation of his Order during his absence in Egypt was the culmination of a long process, perhaps of an inevitable process. Ideas have no power to remain in the first freshness of their youth and beauty. Like those who conceive them, they mature and age and die ; or passing into other forms, they live a changed and transmuted life, as a race lives on in generations that have left far behind them the virtues and simplicities of the stock from which they sprang. There is about those first Umbrian days, when Francis and his little company wandered with care-free hearts on ways that were full of beauty and wonder, a pathos indescribable. It is the pathos of childhood, the pathos of that which is doomed to fade and perish. Love needs no laws. A family is not an institution. It is guided by personalities, not by written rules. So long as Francis was the head of a family, he was safe from anxiety. When he came back from Rome with an approved Rule in his hand, the childhood of the movement was over, and

the thoughtless unreflecting gaiety of childhood had vanished, never to return. The development of the family of St. Francis into a monastic Order involved, as all organisation does, the loss of freedom and spontaneity. It entailed also the emergence of anxious questions. Was the Order to have buildings in which to carry on its work, and schools in which to propagate its ideas? In the case of the Franciscans, the inevitable strain was aggravated by the fact that the Order grew much too fast. The new recruits could not be assimilated. They lost touch, and no disaster could be greater, with the radiant personality of their leader. The early fidelity was absent in many who had enjoyed little or no personal contact with Francis. In these the spirit of compromise developed early. They wished to own property, to live in stone houses, to gather the fruits of their popularity with the people, and even to receive offices of honour and emolument in the Church. Francis had not a grain of compromise in his disposition. He was a tolerant man. One of his strictest instructions to his early followers was that they were not to judge harshly, or deem themselves better than, those who lived in worldly comfort or even in luxury. He permitted no jealousy between the friars and the parish clergy. Even

when these were unworthy, Francis forbade any of his Order to condemn them, or to lower their prestige in the eyes of their parishioners.

"We are sent as helpers to the clergy," he used to say, "in promoting the salvation of souls, and what in them is found absent should be supplied by ourselves. . . . If ye shall have been sons of peace, ye will gain clergy and people, and this is more acceptable to God than to win the people alone after having scandalised the clergy. Cover their failings, and supplement their many defects; then when ye shall have done this, be ye the more humble."

This was the manifestation of a great tolerance. But in regard to his own vocation, and that of those who of their own will had embraced the life of poverty, Francis was utterly uncompromising. Already, before he went to the East, his saddened heart had lost much of its gaiety. The powers of the Church had gripped his Order, and he was no longer master in his own house. There is an inner value, as of parable, about the story of that stone building which Francis found, with dismay, close to the Porziuncola, when he arrived at the General Chapter of 1217. Francis climbed up on the roof, without delay, and began to pull the building down. The civic rulers of Assisi sent soldiers to compel the

saint to desist. "This building is not yours," they said, "it belongs to the city." This voice of authority was echoed by influential voices in the Order itself. Francis came down from the roof in great sorrow of heart. In truth there was a house in the process of building of which he was not the owner. There was a new habitation being built for the spirit of his Order, and he had no power to pull it down.

This action of inevitable forces was intensified by other factors. It is proverbial that success gives rest, and failure trouble. The ambitious delegations to foreign lands for the conversion of other peoples were failures. Outside Italy, both Church and State were suspicious, and often hostile, and the friars had no letters of commendation to smooth their rough path. The sheep had gone forth in the midst of wolves, and the wolves had proved vicious. And that simple trust in God, that simple obedience to Christ, which was the unswerving law of Francis, alike for success and failure, was already set aside by the Vicars, when Francis came back from the East. Moreover, the policy of the Vicars was popular. It met a need that large sections of the Order admitted, whatever Francis might say or think to the contrary.

It will always be a vexed question whether

Francis was right or wrong to go to Egypt. He could scarcely send his followers on distant and hazardous missions, and stay behind himself. Yet his one hope was to face the unwelcome tendencies early, and with the authority of a leader who demanded loyalty. The conclusion is hard to resist, that Francis failed in some measure because he was deficient in some of the qualities of leadership. It was not, certainly, in the higher qualities of a spiritual leader, that he came short. He had vision, passion, a magnetic attraction for others, treasures of personality ; but in his humility he was loth to be first. He lacked the inferior, yet essential, aptitudes of a commander, the power to assert himself, to break opposition, to demand personal loyalty as a right. Francis should have been in name, as well as in reality, the first man of his Order, the prince among his peers. The Vicars were an error of judgment. And the willingness of Francis to be second to his earliest Vicar-General was a profound mistake, however pure and lovable the character revealed by that mistake.

Remember that early day when Francis and his first friends marched into Rome under the captaincy of Brother Bernard. It might be harmless then : but it was a mistake that could be made too often, and it reveals how easily

the humility of St. Francis might become a defect in the handling of men.

These considerations will help us to form some idea of the position of St. Francis when he resumed contact with his old life, after long absence, at Bologna, which he reached on the 15th of August, 1220, from Venice. His appearance created a great stir. The story of his dealings with the Sultan had preceded him. He was an object of curiosity, of veneration, and of awe in the minds of the great mass of the people. By a strange paradox he was more powerful with those outside his Order, and less powerful with those inside it. This latter fact was proved by the opposition he provoked by his first action in Bologna. He found a new building there, on a prominent site, and learned with a shock of anger and amazement that it belonged to his own Order. It was a seminary for the instruction of those joining the movement. With nerves on edge Francis acted hastily and imprudently and ordered the immediate abandonment of a building which gave the lie to the very idea of the Order, the idea of poverty. On Peter Stacia, who had built this monastery, he administered a vehement rebuke, and went so far as to call down the curse of heaven on his head. It was represented to the infuriated

Francis that there were sick brothers in the building, who might not easily find another lodging. But Francis was inexorable, and had his way for a time, though it was a victory worse than a defeat, revealing as it did a new Francis, excitable, overstrained in word and action, less serene and beautiful in temper than men had deemed him. This is not to disregard the bitter provocation that he had endured in seeing the Order deny the very reason of its existence. Emerson, in one of his Essays, remarked on the number of people who seem not quite available for that idea which they represent, and contrasted with them the bolder spirit and the surrendered soul of the true leader of men. It is such a contrast that meets us here, in the first shock of the discovery by Francis of how far and how fast the movement had drifted in his absence.

In the heat of his spirit Francis made his way to Rome, demanded an audience of Pope Honorius, and asked that Cardinal Ugolino should be given to him as his protector and adviser in all things concerning his Order. His request was granted, the offending Vicars deposed, and Peter Cathanii re-instated in power at the Porziuncola, while Francis himself was charged with the task which he at last conceded to be necessary, the revision of his Rule in order to fit the changed circum-

stances of the Brothers Minor, now become an exceeding great multitude.

It is important to note that Francis was as incensed at increased severities in the customs of the brethren, as at increased self-indulgences. The prohibition of the eating of meat, and the addition of another day of fasting in the week, made him as angry as the owning of buildings and the receiving of letters of protection in foreign countries. The explanation of this is in the firm conviction of Francis that his Rule was Christ's Rule, a way of liberty and joy, whereas the commands of the disloyal Vicars were man's Rule, a way of servitude. It was law, not liberty now for the little poor men : and in exchange they might build houses and Churches and libraries and schools, and become like any other of the monastic orders. Francis saved something out of the wreck, but not that which he counted most precious. Cardinal Ugolino was a good and just man, and he stood by Francis manfully. But the cast of his mind was ecclesiastical, and his view of the future of the Brothers Minor ran along the lines already laid down by the existing monastic Orders.

Francis was not made to be a monk. He was too joyous and simple for that. He was not made to be a slave. He was a child, not

a servant in his Heavenly Father's house. Yet he was no rebel against Pope or Cardinal or Mother Church. His life is free from the element of pain and disorder that comes when early associations are broken in the stress of a great crisis of choice and reformation. He had the mystic's power of finding the Divine in any symbol of His grace. And it was to Christ that his untroubled allegiance was given. To Him he was as true as the needle to the north. Here was the inner refuge of his spirit in the storm that swept down upon his trustful path.

The course of events might have been much more favourable to Francis, had Peter Cathanii lived to help him with his loyal friendship. But the Vicar-General died on the 10th day of March, 1221, and when the Chapter met in May Brother Elias was elected in his stead. Elias is the mystery-figure of the Franciscan Movement. That Francis esteemed him is certain; that he cared for Francis when he was weak and ill is also certain. He seemed to share in the great ideals of his master, yet no man did more to distort the brotherhood out of all recognition. Perhaps it was Cardinal Ugolino who pressed for his appointment as Vicar; more probably Francis was blind to the potentialities of evil

ambition latent in the proud, gracious figure of Elias, and himself made the whip that was to scourge his own back. For Elias cruelly betrayed his trust. He led the Order into ways of secular gain and glory. He twisted the semblance of poverty into an inferior likeness. He could not have mistaken the aims of Francis ; for at that very Chapter at which Elias was appointed the Saint flung down a two-fold challenge to the secularizing party among the friars. After officiating as a deacon at the Holy Service (he was never a priest), Francis mounted the pulpit and preached from the text :—" Blessed be the Lord, my God, who teacheth my hands to fight." His sermon was a clarion call to his friends, many of whom came from lonely hermitages among the hills, where they had taken refuge from the tyranny of the Vicars. When the deliberations of the Chapter began, Francis produced his revised Rule, which, to the surprise of all, made no substantial concessions, though it embodied certain papal and ecclesiastical enactments. With what thoughts did Elias listen to the unveiling of the unconquerable hopes of his leader and friend ? Did he simulate agreement till his election was secure ? One of the most vivacious and interesting of Mr. Laurence Housman's " Little Plays of St. Francis " is that which deals

with this memorable and ever-to-be-regretted choice.

From that day forward, the path of Francis grew lonelier and sadder. Perhaps a woman's sympathy was what he needed most in those dark days. It is sad to think that Francis had a rule that he would look no woman in the face. He met them with sunken head and averted eyes, save in the case of those two whom he made exceptions to his rule—the Lady Giacoma di Settesoli, a wealthy and devout widow who was an unfailing friend to the Order and to Francis; and, secondly, the Lady Clare. In the days of sadness that settled down on him, he was too timid of evil tongues to allow his brothers to visit Clare and her sisters, as of old. But Clare, with a gentle insistence, overcame his scruples. Was there ever a sweeter legend of graciousness and purity and peace than that which is told in the fifteenth chapter of the Fioretti of the meal which Francis and Clare partook of together at the Porziuncola? "When came the day ordained by him, Saint Clare, with one companion . . . came unto Saint Mary of the Angels. . . . And in the meantime, Saint Francis let make ready the table on the bare ground, as he was wont to do. And the hour of breaking bread being come, they set

themselves down together, Saint Francis and Saint Clare, and one of the companions of Saint Francis with the companion of Saint Clare, and all the other companions took each his place at the table with all humility. And at the first dish, Saint Francis began to speak of God so sweetly, so sublimely, and so wondrously that the fulness of divine grace came down upon them, and they were all rapt in God. And as they were thus rapt, with eyes and hands uplift to heaven, the folk of Assisi and Bettona, and the country round about, saw that Saint Mary of the Angels, and all the House, and the wood that was just hard by the House, were burning brightly, and it seemed as it were a great fire that filled the church and the House and the whole wood together : for the which cause the folk of Assisi ran thither in great haste for to quench the flames, believing of a truth that the whole place was all on fire. But coming close up to the House and finding no fire at all, they entered within and found Saint Francis and Saint Clare and all their company in contemplation rapt in God, and sitting round that humble board."

This gracious legend is after all but the embellishment of a fact. Even if Francis and Clare met but seldom, we may be sure that Francis took opportunity, as occasion arose, to

consult Clare. It had been well if he had seen her more frequently, for Clare in her life of quiet work and prayer had become stronger, surer, with a noble equipoise of character : while Francis, tried in nerve, and weakened in body, and fretted by disloyalty, was often in ill case, and sorely in need of his friend's sanity and wisdom.

Yet it must not be supposed that the suffering of Francis was personal to himself. He had a strange way of singing triumph songs over any insult or indignity offered to himself. Brother Leo once asked him wherein perfect joy consisted, and Francis answered him with this parable : " When we shall have come to St. Mary of the Angels, dripping as we are with the rain and frozen with the cold, splashed with mud and afflicted with hunger, and shall knock at the house door, if the porter should come and ask angrily, ' Who are you ? ' and we reply, ' We are two of your brethren ' ; and he should say, ' You speak falsely : you are two rogues, who go about the world stealing alms from the poor, be off with you ' : and if he refused to open the door to us, but left us without, exposed till night to the snow and the wind and the torrents of rain, in cold and hunger ; then if we should bear such insults and rejections . . . patiently, without disturbance and without murmuring

at him . . . O Brother Leo, write that therein is perfect joy. If we should bear all these things patiently and with gladness, thinking on the griefs and sufferings of the Blessed Christ, as that which we ought to bear for His love—O Brother Leo, write that it is in such a state that there is perfect joy."

But that which injured the peace of his Order marred even the perfect joy which Francis found in personal sufferings. Still in Assisi we see the street of Brother Elias ; still in Assisi we see the great majestic buildings that Elias raised in honour of the dead Francis. Yet upon the living Poverello Elias bore hard, manifesting those tendencies that caused him at last to die an outcast from the Order which his unbridled talents had perverted into worldly and selfish ways. The most singular incident of this painful struggle with Elias must serve as an example of all. Francis in great travail of spirit wrote still another Rule for the Order, and sent it a little later to Brother Elias. After an interval, the Vicar-General intimated to Francis that the new Rule had been accidentally lost. We can see Elias, with the eye of our imagination, thrusting the document so hostile to his own views into the glowing heart of the fire. His audacity triumphed, and the next version had to make

concessions to the party who were lording it over the Poor Man of Assisi.

Yet out of this time of grief, Francis emerged with a heart at peace. He owed this victory to another of his mystical experiences. Christ seemed to speak to him in these words:—"O poor little man, why are you distressed? Have I so placed you a shepherd over My flock that you are ignorant that I am its great Defender?" The Divine Voice went on to give Francis gracious assurance of protection. Christ would feed the flock, would make good the loss of any who should fall away. Even if but three faithful ones were left the Order should remain unshaken. From that day forward Francis walked as in a dream, his life more and more hid with Christ in God.

CHAPTER VII

THE MARKS OF THE LORD JESUS

It was the unswerving desire of Francis that his life should be an imitation of Christ. Ever there rang in his ears the Master's word :— "The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master, and the servant as his Lord." By the faithfulness of that long imitation Francis grew into Christ. He was as the branch abiding in the True Vine. He asked nothing from the world save what Christ had received from it. And those contradictions and disappointments, of which the previous chapter speaks, became at last to him, a Divine gift. No man gave truer heed to the exhortation of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews : "For consider Him that endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." If for a season Francis had fainted, he had found, as we have already seen, a wonderful consolation from his Lord.

Did he ever regret the choice that made him a homeless and childless man? Did he ever yearn for the home joys which he had denied himself? There is record of one spell of fierce temptation. Francis, after a fashion we cannot but think mistaken, scourged his body to expel the solicitation of the treacherous impulses which it harboured. He was cruelly marked and wounded, but his enemy remained with him.

Disregarding the snow that lay on the ground, and the bitter cold, and his own nakedness, Francis sprang from his shelter, and began in fever of spirit, and in sharp suffering of his frozen body, to heap up fantastic images in the snow, calling them in tragic mood of mocking irony his wife, his sons, his daughters, his servants. He bade himself clothe them, feed them, care for them. "Behold what a trouble they are to you," is his whimsical conclusion. "O poor little man, it would be better for you to serve God only." He returned to his cell at peace with himself, with his past, with his choice of Christ alone. That little incident is worth a volume of interpretation, so vivid is the light that it casts on the Saint, on his humanity, on his self-discipline, on the greatness of his renunciation. Such hours of stress must have been few. This man had counted the cost of

his discipleship, and was prepared to pay his price, and to reckon it all gain for Christ's sake.

St. Francis was living a supernormal life ; and there was more and more of that supernormal element as the shadows closed in upon the evening of his short earthly day.

One of the later followers of the Franciscan ideal, the famous preacher, Berthold, has said : " Love is like fire ; whatever is placed in the fire, becomes fire. So is it with love. All that can befall a man who possesses true love is itself converted into love." The words might be a commentary on this period of the life of Francis. Everything became love. Every experience was absorbed into his love for Christ. The understanding of that fact is the necessary forerunner of any knowledge of the wonderful event to which we are drawing near in the Saint's story. As the dominant, sacred thought of His approaching passion is the key to the understanding of the Transfiguration of Christ ; so the eager, unceasing feeding of the flame of his love for the Suffering Saviour is the key to the profound experience of the Stigmata. Francis had been dissolving his whole being into the fire of love. The wisdom of the Saints is love, and love's sorrow is their reward. Of that supreme lore Francis is the master-saint

of history. That the crown of his devotion was unique is no more wonderful, perhaps, than the unique love with which he won that crown. His biographers have rightly protested against any reading of his life that would separate the marvel of his self-immolation from the marvel of his Stigmata. All is of one piece. All is of grace, all is of God. From that long bygone day at San Damiano Francis had been moving nearer and nearer to the Cross, and to the Crucified, and to the realization of Divine Suffering for human sin. That which distinguishes the last months, before the great wonder befell him, is an accelerated haste, a more intense concentration of desire, and with these a premonition that he was on the threshold of some unveiling, some response, some emotion that his heart might scarcely hold, some knowledge from which the eyes of men around him were holden. There is, in the closing days of 1223, and in the opening months of 1224, an evident purpose on the part of Francis to prepare himself for some sacrament of communion which was for himself alone. His seclusion at the hermitage of Greccio is the beginning for which Monte Alvernia provides a sequel. Let us not go to La Verna till we have rested for a while at Greccio.

There is a charming description of Greccio

and its secluded peace in Father Cuthbert's "Life of St. Francis of Assisi," and the curious may be commended to his pages. The saint occupied a rocky retreat, where a neighbouring landowner, his good friend, had made a little hermitage for Francis and his companions. The Poverello came to this exquisite spot a fortnight before Christmas, and remained till after Easter. It seems to me that Francis had a definite design. He wished in a period of intense meditation and devotion to follow the Lord Jesus from the manger to the Cross. It was to be a comprehensive, detailed, adoring absorption of every word and incident of the life of the Saviour looked at from the view-point of suffering. Thus the Christmas celebrations, which awakened the interest of the whole neighbouring population, dwelt upon the story of Bethlehem, not in its sweet message of joy, but as the beginning of a great suffering. Francis, though in pain and weakness, made his own life sacrificial, in keeping with his devout imitation of Christ, by a constant ministry of preaching and helpfulness to the people of Greccio and the surrounding villages. But when the lights went out in farmhouse and cottage, a gleam came from the lonely hillside where Francis was but beginning his nightly vigil of entreaty and intercession and remembrance.

One only food could satisfy his hungering soul, one only presence could slake the thirst of his spirit. In Greccio a human soul grew nearer and ever nearer to the object of its desire. This profound time of preparation being past, Francis returned to Assisi and to the larger duties of his vocation. He was listening for the inner voice that should tell him that the hour of his passion was at hand.

It was in September that the Saint set his face towards Monte Alvernia, with the purpose of keeping there the Lent of St. Michael, and with the assurance that the time of the Divine visitation was upon him. Francis had one solitary material possession, the summit of Monte Alvernia, or La Verna ; by a romantic chain of events, he who was vowed to poverty had yet some proprietary right in this mountain peak, which could yield him no harvest except the world's best harvest, beauty and peace. That lonely mountain of the Casentino was chosen to be the scene of a sacrament of body and spirit that has made the memory of Francis of Assisi a wonder and an amazement to the children of men.

Mrs. Oliphant, following "The Little Flowers," gives the Saint but three companions on his strange quest. But there were at least six : Leo, Angelo, Masseo, Ruffino, Silvestro and

Illuminato. Possibly there was a seventh, Bonizzo. Francis, however, wished to be alone, and when they reached their destination he chose a ledge of rock, divided from the hillside by a deep chasm. A plank was thrown across the gulf, a wicker cell constructed for Francis, and strict injunctions given that no one was to approach the spot but Leo, the nearest friend and intimate of the Saint. It was Leo's task to bring a scanty diet of bread and water daily, and to return a second time at midnight to unite with Francis in prayer. Even Leo must not cross the bridge unless Francis answered his signal. One night Leo had no response to his call, and in great fear he broke the rule, and heard Francis speaking to his Unseen Friend. The Saint was kneeling with face and hands lifted up to God, and his words were at once the expression of an utter humility, and of a wonderful nearness : "Who art Thou, my most sweet God? Who am I, a most vile worm and Thy useless servant?" Leo was but gently rebuked for his disobedience. Francis seemed to feel the need of his presence, and made him read from the book of the Gospels, the records of Christ's sufferings.

On the 14th of September, 1224, the day of the Festival of the Holy Cross, the great experience came to that ecstatic life, now so utterly detached

from things earthly. Before dawn he had fallen on his knees in front of his cell, and turning his face to the east had uttered from his intrepid heart in fervent prayer the two desires which consumed him: "O my Lord Jesus Christ, I pray Thee, grant me two graces before I die, that I may feel, in my soul and in my body, the pain that Thou, sweet Lord, didst endure in the hour of Thy most bitter passion; and that I may feel in my heart the exceeding love wherewith Thou, O Son of God, wast inflamed to endure willingly such agony for us sinners." With his heart on fire with a prayer such as no other disciple of Christ had ever dared to pray, Francis waited for, and received, the assurance that his prayer would be granted an answer. Then, in an ecstasy of love, he meditated upon the sufferings of Christ, till, like Paul, he seemed rather out of the body than in the body. To him, thus affected, there appeared a vision as of a Crucified Seraph, and the face of the Seraph standing there was beautiful beyond earthly beauty, yet marked with a suffering which utterly broke the heart of him who gazed thereon. A message flashed into the soul of Francis. It was as though a great light were shining on the world's dark things. Yet when the vision passed Francis was sore perplexed as one who under-

stood not the meaning of the revelation vouchsafed to him. But not for long. In his hands and feet came an appearance, as it were, of the round black heads of nails, while on the back of the hands and in the soles of the feet was the likeness of the bent points. And his right side was wounded with a wound from which the blood oozed. St. Francis bore henceforth in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus.

So startling a narrative at once invites incredulity ; and yet the more closely this story is investigated, the more difficult it seems to doubt its truth. It is no late legend. It was current in the Saint's life-time. It was officially declared at his death. The theory that Brother Elias invented it breaks down hopelessly in view of the fact that those who looked on Elias as a traitor, the very men who were with Francis on the mountain, could have denounced Elias and exposed him. Yet none of them did so. Instead they have left independent testimony of a very strong nature. " The Story of the Three Companions " is written by three of the little band who were on Monte Alvernia on that fateful day. Their belief in the Stigmata is unhesitating. A brother who was not there, Brother Boniface, a good and true man, declared of the wounds : " These sinful eyes have seen them, and these

sinful hands have touched them." There is one thing, not I think noted in any of the lives of St. Francis I have seen, which appeals to me strongly, the evidence of the vision itself. Had it been fabricated, the figure seen by Francis would most certainly have been our Saviour Himself. But this confused notion of a Seraph, as it were crucified, reminiscent of our Lord yet not He, seems to me to stamp the vision with an authenticity which diffuses itself over the whole story of the Stigmata. Moreover in a fictitious narrative the pain suffered by the saint in the infliction of the Stigmata would have been emphasized and exaggerated in a way of which the restrained story of the early lives knows nothing. Even Sabatier, so sceptical of all that savours of the miraculous, is driven to accept the bodily wonder by the force of evidence that cannot be weakened. In "The Review of the Churches," in an article published in October, 1924, in commemoration of the seven hundredth anniversary of the Stigmata, Sabatier reiterates his earlier judgment with additional and weighty arguments, paying special attention to the autograph benediction which St. Francis gave to Brother Leo at La Verna, and to the testimonies written on the back in the handwriting of Leo. It may safely be said that only the ultra-

sceptical doubt to-day the reality of the Stigmata.

As to the cause of so great a marvel, the Middle Ages had no glimpse of the explanation that comes so readily to the modern mind, that by the power of self-suggestion the spirit of St. Francis so acted upon its bodily home as to mark the flesh with these strange and sacred marks. The appearance of wounds has, in modern times, been produced on the human body by hypnotic suggestion ; and Francis can be represented as a man self-hypnotized by the concentration of his whole thought on the sufferings of his Lord. This modern reading of the wonder of La Verna may be valid in regard to the vehicle or agency through which the physical results happened ; but if the explanation is pushed, as in a certain school of thought is inevitable, to shut out the Divine, and make the great transaction of this holy mount a merely human hallucination with results that flowed from man and not from God, then the theory becomes a falsehood and a violation of the evidence. The Stigmata must be considered in conjunction with the miracle of the Saint's concentrated devotion, and in conjunction with his marvellous life and his marvellous visions. There is an element of the world that is beyond this world, of the reality that is beyond

this reality, in the life of Francis of Assisi, that no explanation will ever explain away. Sabatier, in the article already quoted, writes : " Between St. Francis and the great number of cases of Stigmata who have followed him, there is an abyss." That is not putting it too strongly. On Monte Alvernia the power of the Divine met the devotion of the human. The Stigmata were a response to the longings of a soul seeking some union, it knew not what, with the Saviour it adored : they were a strange mark of participation in the agony of Redemption, granted to one who had been supremely faithful to the Divine Voice which said : " This is my Beloved Son ; hear Him."

The poetic soul of Francis could not but enshrine in sacred verse the rapture of his soul. His hymn, utterly impersonal, utterly adoring, is thus rendered for us by Father Cuthbert :

" Thou art the Holy Lord God ; Thou art God of gods,
Who alone workest marvels.
Thou art strong, Thou art great, Thou art most high ;
Thou art Almighty, Thou Holy Father, King of heaven and earth.
Thou art threefold and one ; Lord God of gods.
Thou art good, every good, the highest good ;
The Lord God, living and true.
Thou art love, charity ; Thou art wisdom ;
Thou art humility.
Thou art patience ; Thou, fortitude and prudence.
Thou art security, Thou art rest ; Thou art joy and gladness.

Thou art justice and temperance; Thou art all our wealth and plenty.
Thou art beauty, Thou art gentleness; Thou art the Protector; Thou art the Keeper and the Defender.
Thou art our refuge and strength; Thou art our faith, hope, and charity.
Thou art our great sweetness; Thou art our eternal life.
Infinite Goodness, great and wonderful Lord God Almighty: loving and merciful Saviour."

In such words of grace did Francis, bearing in his body the marks of the Lord Jesus, praise his Saviour. The manuscript, in the handwriting of St. Francis, and bearing on its back the blessing with which he blessed Brother Leo, together with Leo's own attestation of the blessing, and of the fact of the Stigmata, is the precious treasure of the Convent at Assisi.

This chapter may fitly close with some verses of another poem of a different and inferior order, as self-conscious as the authentic poem is selfless, as elaborate as the other is simple. It is an early Franciscan effort to express what the Saint left unexpressed :

"Love has cast me into the furnace.
He my new spouse, the loving lamb, gave me the ring.
He threw me into prison then, and with a sword he wounded me. My heart was cleft.
Love has cast me into the furnace.

Wonder not that I die of sweetness; these blows he gave me with a lance of love. The blade is long and broad, a hundred fathoms long: it pierced me through and through.

Love has cast me into the furnace.

Translated not by death but by excess of power, my heart within became so strong that I revived, and followed those guides who led me to the Court of Heaven.

Love has cast me into the furnace.

Myself again, I took my arms and rode upon his country. I met him, and resisted him, and took revenge on him.

Love has cast me into the furnace.

Then after my revenge I made a covenant with him, because his love had from the first been true.

Now my heart can hold and treasure the consolations of Christ.

Love has cast me into the furnace.

He has cast me into the furnace of love."

CHAPTER VIII

FRANCIS COMES HOME TO DIE

THE profound and lonely experience of the Stigmata set Francis apart even from those, his familiar friends, who were with him on the mountain. Henceforth he listened to music that they could not hear, and walked a path they might not tread. Yet he did all that in him lay to break down the barrier. The wounds must be hidden from others. They were a secret between Christ and His disciple. But was it right to hide the truth from these devoted comrades? Francis put it to them in a vague way, asking counsel. If God granted a special favour should it be hidden or revealed? Illuminato gave the answer. The secrets of heaven are not granted to Francis for himself alone. He must not hide his talent in the earth. The Saint thereupon confided to them the secret. But they were forbidden to divulge it.

This section of the story of Francis is spangled with miracle as the night sky with stars. It may be that this is a later embroidery upon the story, a tribute to what was thought seemly in the train of the supreme wonder. Or it may be that

the healing gifts that accompany spiritual exaltation actually manifested themselves in those last years of the Saint's life. There seems evidence enough that the mystery of La Verna had been noised abroad ; that Francis was treated as a Saint and a worker of miracles ; and that henceforth the simplicity of his days was invaded by a curiosity, at times reverential and full of adoration, at times impertinent ; in either case totally unwelcome to that humble spirit.

Although the Stigmata brought in their train an added burden of weakness and suffering, Francis persisted in doing the work of an evangelist. And this he did with a mighty power. The outward man was perishing, the inward man was being renewed day by day. Yet even the unconquerable spirit could not avail against the need of rest and medical care. Cardinal Ugolino summoned Francis to Rieti for treatment, and meekly the Saint obeyed. But first he desired to see Clare, probably that she might hear from his own lips the story of La Verna. At San Damiano his illness became so aggravated that it was evident he could not proceed. A period of weakness and despondency supervened, and never had his inner band of adherents seen their dear master's joyous spirit so overcast. Yet as the blinding flash of lightning out of the

blackness of the thunder cloud came great light out of this thick darkness. For after a wakeful night in which strange consolations flowed into his soul, Francis declared to his friends that he had resolved to sing a new song of God and of His Gifts. Out of that purpose, in Clare's little garden at San Damiano, flashed forth in joy and melody the Canticle of the Sun :

> O most high, almighty, good Lord God, to thee belong praise, glory, honour, and all blessing! No man is worthy to name Thy Name.
>
> Praised be my Lord God with all His creatures, and specially our brother the sun, who brings us the day, and who brings us the light ; fair is he and shines with a very great splendour ; O Lord, he signifies to us Thee!
>
> Praised be my Lord for our sister the moon, and for the stars, the which He has set clear and lovely in heaven.
>
> Praised be my Lord for our brother the wind, and for air and cloud, calms and all weather, by the which thou upholdest life in all creatures.
>
> Praised be my Lord for our sister water, who is very serviceable unto us and humble and precious and clean.
>
> Praised be my Lord for our brother fire, through whom thou givest us light in the darkness ; and he is bright and pleasant and very mighty and strong.
>
> Praised be my Lord for our mother the earth, the which doth sustain us and keep us, and bringeth forth divers fruits and flowers of many colours, and grass.
>
> O creatures all! give praise and blessing to my Lord, and grateful be, and serve him with a deep humility.
>
> (Matthew Arnold's translation revised.)

Here is the old Hebrew psalm, with a difference, with its awe and adoration as keenly felt,

yet transmuted into nearness and intimacy and tenderness ; with all creation stretching out loving arms of brotherhood and sisterhood ; sun and moon, wind and water, earth and fire, heralds of God and of His helpfulness, messengers of Divine grace and nearness. And lest we accuse " The Canticle of Brother Sun " of blindness to the darker and more sorrowful side of existence, let us hold fast in our hearts this knowledge, that it came from the lips and from the heart of a broken and suffering man.

It was a hymn which soon began to gather to itself a history. For it was strong and powerful, a worker for God. The Bishop of Assisi and the magistrates were at strife, and the city was convulsed with bitterness. Francis summoned the leaders on both sides to the courtyard of the Bishop's Palace. There they were met by a band of the brothers with the tuneful Pacifico, poet laureate of the friars, at their head. The brothers, faithful to the directions of Francis, broke out into the joyous words of the Canticle, but ere the final call to praise they inserted the words Francis had added but that morning :

> Praise be to Thee, my Lord, for all who grant forgiveness at' the behest of Thy love ; for all who partake of weakness and hardship. Blessed are they who dwell in peace, for they shall receive Thy Crown, O Lord most High.

Straight to the heart of that bitter controversy flew the winged arrow that Francis had shot from his bow. The acrimony was slain, the folly of strife was exposed. There was an immediate and humble reconciliation. The blessing on all peace-makers brooded that day over San Damiano, and over Assisi with its crest of towers. The Sermon on the Mount had been proved, not beautiful and sacred and impracticable, as we hear it called to-day, but a worker for righteousness and peace, a reconciler. Francis was so overjoyed when he heard the news, that he would have sent out his brethren, on the moment, to sing through every land the hymn of Brother Sun.

Many places can claim a share in the last heroisms of the life of St. Francis. Passive in the hands of his advisers he went from one place to another receiving treatment. Himself racked with pain, he brought succour—it may be healing—to the woes of others. For the sick were brought to him everywhere, that he might lay his hands on them, and pray with them ; so powerful over the minds of all was the secret rumour of the Stigmata. After Clare's garden at San Damiano, we find Francis at Rieti, at the hermitage of Monte Rainerio, at Siena, everywhere suffering, everywhere courageous, everywhere full of new plans. " My brothers," he cried at

this time, " let us set out to serve the Lord God, for as yet we have done nothing, or hardly anything." Who can think of him, who can listen to such words, without waking to life some of the sleeping courage of his own soul ?

It was at Monte Rainerio that the Saint had his famous meeting with Brother Fire. For his acute eye-trouble it was deemed advisable to cauterize his forehead or cheek with a red-hot iron. With a flash of his old playfulness that masked a superb courage, he said, as he watched the iron glowing in the fire : " O my brother fire ! Before all creatures for strength and beauty art Thou ! Be courteous to me now, for I have ever loved thee, and ever will love thee for love of Him thy Creator." Francis bore this ordeal with cool fortitude, making light of the pain, and expressing surprise at the perturbation of his companions, most of whom were so overcome by the alarming preparations that they hastily left the cell before the hot iron touched the flesh.

The storied heart of Siena has treasured little for us of those days when Francis made his home there ; more than a century later her own St. Catherine was to be born within her, and to make dim for her proud mother heart the memory even of St. Francis. It is of Catherine that we think when we tread the narrow streets, and seek

the shadow of the ancient and crumbling palaces, and marvel at the wonders of the Duomo. Yet was Francis the forerunner of the gentle Catherine, though she wore the habit of the rival Order and gave her allegiance to Dominic. The Poor Man of Assisi made possible such consecrated lives in the centuries that followed. If we could track the hidden paths of influence, we should doubtless find the words and devotion of Francis living on in one citizen of Siena after another, in one generation after another, till on the head of the child Catherine was laid the unseen hand of poor Brother Francis, who lies a frail and dying man in an upper room in Siena, which was to him as the Chamber of Peace in the House Beautiful, whose windows opened towards the sun-rising. Not on the soaring, wonderful Torre del Mangia did the gaze of Francis rest, for it was not begun till 1338, yet his eyes saw even then the glories of a greater city, a city with twelve gates and with streets of pure gold. And as his disciples saw that far-off vision reflected in his eyes, they cried : " Father, what shall we do without thee ? Unto whom dost thou leave us orphans ? Thou hast ever been father and mother unto us. Thou hast been leader and shepherd, master and corrector, teaching and correcting us more by example than by word. Whither, therefore, shall we go,

sheep without a shepherd, orphan sons without a father, men rude and simple without a leader ?" Francis stilled their weeping, and gave them his blessing : he knew that their words were true.

Brother Elias, alarmed at the sorrowful news from Siena, was soon in the midst of the distracted group by the bedside of the Saint. His authority asserted itself towards one essential decision. Francis must die at Assisi. The brothers protested, as boldly as they dared ; their master was not fit for the journey. He would die by the roadside. His days must not be shortened. Elias was inflexible, and he had this advantage over the brethren, that Francis was on his side. His thoughts, too, were turning to Assisi, and San Damiano, and the Porziuncola, and his feeble voice commanded by holy obedience that Elias should be obeyed. That astute counsellor would not even consent to take Francis by the shortest route, past the dominant and lordly city of Perugia, which still seems to threaten all who take the valley road for Assisi. Francis must endure the long mountain detour by Gubbio and Nocera, lest Perugia capture the body of the dying saint, and make itself a place of pilgrimage, whither unborn generations may come to venerate the bones of Francis.

It is a revelation of the Middle Ages in their

strength and in their weakness, that tells us more in its quiet suggestiveness than many a noisy narrative of battle and bloodshed. Poor Francis must be jolted over bad roads for many a weary mile, because the dead body of a saint is so much more precious to the Church than his living personality with its tortured nerves and its suffering heart. We may scarce forgive ambitious Brother Elias or covetous Sister Perugia for that inhumanity inflicted on the meek and patient Poverello.

Slow was the journey, with many stops and many resting-places. Above Nocera a band of soldiers joined them, charged by the rulers of Assisi to bring the Saint in safety to their city, dead or alive. For Elias would leave nothing to chance, and the escort came at his request. In keeping with that resemblance between the life of Francis and the life of his Divine Master, which impresses itself forcibly upon us at certain points of his story, was the entrance of that guarded procession into Assisi. As was the joy of the multitude when with waving palms and loud hosannas they greeted the coming of the Christ to His death at Jerusalem, so was the excitement of the citizens as they went out to greet the Saint, and to acclaim his greatness. Father Cuthbert has a curious passage on this incident,

in which he ascribes the joy of the people to their knowledge that the Saint was dying, and that soon they would enshrine his body and invoke his aid from heaven.

It is permissible to doubt the correctness of this diagnosis of mass psychology. The simpler elements of the crowd must have thought far more of the living, gentle presence that had become so dear to them, and dearer still by absence. Even in the Middle Ages men might veil their deepest fear with that pretence of cheerfulness which is the pathetic weapon with which we try to frighten away the King of Terrors from those we love. Here was their dear Francis in their midst again. They would show him how they loved him. They would suffer no evil thing to touch him. We can almost hear the aged women assuring one another: "His native air will revive the Poverello." Only cold hearts, and astute minds, like the mind and heart of Brother Elias, would look beyond death, and reckon on the profitable possession of a dead Saint. It is true that the earliest biography, the "First Life," by Thomas of Celano, says: "The multitude hoped that he would die very soon, and that was the subject of their joy." But this ascription of motive is mere monkish commentary, written after the event. Let us think better of human nature, and of Assisi.

CHAPTER IX

THE DEATH OF FRANCIS

Francis was lodged in the Bishop's Palace, for the threat of Perugia, real or imaginary, made it undesirable that he should be taken across the plain to the Porziuncola, or left there unguarded.

The special attendants, who kept watch beside the dying man, were Leo, Angelo, Ruffino, and Masseo. Francis suffered from dropsy, and the disease was so far advanced that the alarming symptoms could neither be checked nor alleviated. It was clear that the Saint's days on earth were numbered.

There seem to have been many alternations of depression and of gladness in that sick-chamber where Francis waited for the unveiling of the great secret. There is evidence that the Saint was bitterly concerned for the future of his Order, and filled with grievous apprehension of the course of events when he himself should be gone. The indications that survive suggest that the censorship of Elias and his successors has blotted out a great deal. The " Legend of the Three Com-

panions" would be of priceless value here, for all three, Leo, Angelo and Ruffino, were in daily attendance on their beloved chief. But there is a great blank in this portion of the story. It did not suit Elias and those who came after him to allow the dying words of Francis to witness against them.

Of inestimable value, then, is the long fragment, cited by Ubertini di Casali on trial at Avignon for his too faithful adherence to the ideals of Francis. He declares that Brother Leo is the authority for it ; and Sabatier thinks it a part of the suppressed story of the Three Companions. It must be summarised here, for it is an authentic word from the death-bed at Assisi.

It asserts that one of those at the bedside reminded Francis of the early days of harmony and peace in the Order, and asked him, with an apology for daring to utter the question, why he had suffered abuses to creep in. Francis flashed out on him with an indignant denial of the imputed blame. He had done all that he could to keep the primitive spirit. Others in authority had betrayed his example and teaching. His charge was a spiritual one. He could not use force or be their executioner.

This passage makes it but too credible that Francis used to start up in his bed and cry :

"Where are they who have stolen my brethren from me?"

There are days of light and days of shadow in every sick-room. Happily there were many days of sunshine in the experience of Francis. His love of singing was undimmed. Music soothed his pain and quieted his spirit. And morning and evening, day and night, the citizens passing the Palace walls would hear exultant melodies, as though there was high revel within.

Enter to the sick-room accordingly Brother Elias with a solemn face and a disapproving air: "Dearest Father," he says, "for all this gladness which thou showest for thyself and thy brethren in the midst of thy sickness I am greatly consoled and edified. But although the men of this city venerate thee as a saint, nevertheless since they believe firmly that by reason of this thine incurable sickness thou art soon about to die, when they hear the Praises chanted thus by day and by night, they may say to one another: 'How is it that this man who is so nigh unto death showeth such gladness of heart? Surely he ought to be thinking of death.'"

Then answered Francis: "Dost thou remember when at Foligno thou didst see a vision, and that thou didst tell me that a certain man said to thee that I could not live longer than two years?

Before that vision which thou didst see by the grace of God, who suggesteth every good thing to the heart and putteth every good word in the mouth of his faithful ones, I used often to consider my latter end both by day and by night. But from that hour in the which thou didst see the vision I have been more anxious every day to think upon the day of my death. Let me, my brother, rejoice in the Lord, in His praises, and in mine own infirmities, since by the grace of the Holy Spirit I am so united and conjoined with my Lord, that by His mercy I am well able to have joy in Him the Most High."

Let us be the unseen hearers of another conversation in that room in Assisi. And let us give thanks to the chroniclers that they have preserved for us that inimitable scruple of the literal-minded Francis concerning the name of the physician of Arezzo:

"In those days there visited him in the same palace a certain physician of Arezzo, by name John Good, who was exceedingly familiar with the Blessed Francis. And Francis put a question to him, saying: 'How seemeth it to thee, my friend—this sickness of dropsy of mine?' Now he was unwilling to call him by his own name; for he never cared to name anyone who was called Good because of his reverence for the Lord, who said: 'No-one is good but God alone.' In the same way he was unwilling to call anyone or to write of anyone in his letters as father or master, by reason of his reverence for the Lord, who said:

"And call no man Father upon earth; nor be ye called masters."

And the physician said to him: "Brother, by the grace of God it will be well with thee." Again did Francis speak to him: 'Tell me the truth. How seemeth it to thee? Do not fear, for by the grace of God, I am not faint-hearted, that I should fear death; for by the help of the grace of the Holy Spirit I am so united with the Lord, that with death and with life I am equally content.'

"Then said to him the physician: 'Clearly, father, according to our knowledge of the human body, thy sickness is incurable, and I believe that either at the end of the month of September, or on the fourth of the Nones of October, thou wilt die.'

"Then the Blessed Francis, as he lay in bed, spread out his hands towards the Lord, and with great gladness of mind and body, said: 'Welcome, my sister Death!'"

A third scene from that death chamber is very memorable. Let the chronicler tell the story:

"After these things a certain brother said to him: 'Father, thy life and conversation hath been and is a light and a mirror not only to the brethren but also to the whole Church, and the same will be thy death; although to thy brethren and many others thy death may be a matter of sadness and sorrow, nevertheless to thee there shall be consolation and infinite joy, for thou wilt pass over from great toil to greatest rest, from many sorrows and temptations to eternal peace, from the temporal poverty which thou hast loved and to which thou hast perfectly been faithful to true infinite riches; and from this temporal death to perpetual life, where thou shalt see face to face thy Lord God, whom in this world thou hast loved with such great fervour of love and longing desire. . . . This have I said for the comforting of thy spirit, that ever in the Lord thou mayest rejoice inwardly

and outwardly, so that thy brethren and others who visit thee may find thee rejoicing in the Lord always, and so that to those who see this, and to others who hear thereof after thy death, thy death may be a perpetual memorial, even as ever have been thy life and conversation."

This unknown brother rightly predicted that the whole world would gaze upon this death-bed. It was a cloudy day with the Saint's soul, but these words spoken in love roused him out of sadness to the joy of the Saints. Eagerly he commanded that Brother Angelo and Brother Leo should be sought, and told to sing to him of Sister Death. They, poor hearts, thinking he was in his extremity, came before him in tears and were at once bidden to sing the "Canticle of Brother Sun." Ere they came to the end he stopped them, and bade them insert before the last praises one verse :

Be praised, Lord, for our sister the death of the body,
Whom no man living may escape;
Alas for them who die in a state of mortal sin;
Blessed they who are found obedient to Thy most holy will,
For the second death shall do them no ill.

Thus the great song found its crown and its completeness.

But Francis would not willingly die within the walls of Assisi. He longed for the Porziuncola, the Home of his Order, the place that he loved.

And at last he had his way. They carried him tenderly out, and through the now disused gateway of Portaccia, and onward across the plain. At the hospice, when half the journey was accomplished, he bade them halt, and turn his face towards Assisi. Raising himself up he blessed the city which he looked on for the last time : " O Lord, as this city of old was, as I believe, the place and habitation of wicked men, so now do I see that on account of Thine abundant mercy, in the time acceptable unto Thee, Thou hast shown forth singularly in this city the multitude of Thy mercies, and by reason of the goodness within this city alone Thou has chosen her for Thyself that she may be the place and the habitation of those who should know Thee in truth, and should give glory to Thy holy name and show forth unto all Christian people the sweet odour of the good report of holy life, of truest doctrine, and of evangelic perfection. I beseech Thee, therefore, Lord Jesus Christ, Father of Mercies, that Thou do not think of our ingratitude, but remember ever the abundant pity which Thou hast extended to her, that always she may be the abode and habitation of those who truly know Thee and glorify Thy Name, blessed and most glorious, for ever and ever. Amen."

With such majesty of farewell, with such

fervour of prayer, Francis looked his last on Assisi with its winding streets that climb higher and higher up the mountain side. He, too, would take the upward path to another and a fairer home.

In his beloved cell at the Porziuncola he dictated his last will and testament, a touching document with precious autobiographical glimpses of the motives and actions of his resplendent life. It begins with these words : " The Lord gave to me Brother Francis thus to begin the life of penance : for when I was in my sins it seemed to me too painful a thing to see lepers, and the Lord Himself led me amongst them, and I dealt mercifully with them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was transformed into sweetness of soul and body ; and afterwards I lingered awhile and then left the world. And the Lord gave me such faith in His churches that I would simply pray and say : We adore Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, here and in all Thy Churches which are in all the world ; and we bless Thee because by Thy Holy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world."

After expressing his devotion to his Church and its clergy and its sacred mysteries, he proceeds : "And after that the Lord had given me the care of the brethren, no man showed me

what I ought to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I must live according to the rule of the Holy Gospel ; and I caused it to be written in few words and simply ; and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me. And those who willed to receive this life gave to the poor all that they possessed, and they were content with one tunic patched within and without, and with a cord and breeches : and we wished for nothing more. We clergy said the office like other clergy, the lay brothers said the Paternoster, and willingly enough we abode in churches. And we were simple and servants to all. And I laboured with my hands, and so I still desire to labour, and I firmly desire that all the other brethren work in some honest service. Let those who know not how to work learn, not through desire to receive the wage of their labour but for example's sake and to avoid idleness. And when the price of our labour is not given to us, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, begging alms from door to door. The Lord made known to me this salutation that we should say : 'The Lord give thee peace.'"

The rest of the testament deals with the points at issue with those who would relax the rule, and reaffirms the strictest regulations of the Order. Hoping by means of this exhortation to

stem the decay in the Order, Francis makes quite clear that his words are without ambiguity, and must never be explained away. The arresting message ends with words of blessing and benediction.

Poor Francis ! Four years after his death his friend, Cardinal Ugolino, then Pope Gregory IX, interpreted and explained the Rule, and declared with his papal authority that the brethren were not bound to the words of the Testament. It was a cynical betrayal of Francis in the house of his friends, and aroused the bitterest indignation of those who remained loyal to his ideals.

With unembarrassed friendship Francis spoke much of Clare in those closing days. He wrote to her and her companions, and charged the messenger with this message : " Go and tell Sister Clare to put aside sorrow and sadness, for albeit she cannot now see me, yet before her death both she herself and her sisters shall see me and have great consolation in me." We know not what mystical interpretation Clare placed upon his words.

A memorable saying of these last days was that which bound the Order to the Porziuncola for ever : " See, my brothers, that you never forsake this house : if you are driven out on one side, enter it again on the other ; for truly this place

is sacred and the dwelling of God. Here when we were but few the Most High caused us to increase ; here with the light of His wisdom He illumined the hearts of His poor ones ; here with the fire of His love, He set our wills on fire ; here whosoever prays with a devout heart shall obtain what he seeks, and whosoever offends will be more severely punished. Wherefore, O sons, hold this house of God's dwelling worthy of all reverence ; and with all your heart in the voice of exultation and praise, confess to God therein."

The Psalms have comforted many death-beds The Psalm that Francis chose for the upward way was the 142nd. We cannot dissociate the choice from the snares of those who would wreck his Order. With what sadness the voices around him must have taken up the plaintive cry : " Deliver me from my persecutors ; for they are stronger than I."

There were tender farewell words between Francis and his first follower, Bernard of the Five Valleys, and while he blessed all who knelt around him, his thoughts went back more and more to the first days, and he bade them give great honour to Bernard. Then imitating his Lord and Saviour he had a loaf broken into small pieces that all might partake together of a sacramental meal.

There are sublime death scenes in history and in literature. In the region of imagination no pen, perhaps, has ever excelled the portrait that Sophocles has painted of the passing of Œdipus. Recall but this one portion of it, the King's farewell to his children with its tribute to the power of love :

> " And when he heard their sudden bitter cry, he put his arms around them, and said : ' My children, this day ends your father's life. For now all has perished that was mine, and no more shall ye bear the burden of tending me—no light one, well I know, my children ; yet, one little word makes all those toils as naught ; *love* had ye from me, as from none beside ; and now ye shall have me with you no more, through all your days to come.' On such wise close-clinging to each other sire and daughters sobbed and wept. But when they had made an end of wailing, and the sound went up no more, there was a stillness ; and suddenly a voice of one who cried aloud to him, so that the hair of all stood up on their heads for sudden fear and they were afraid. For the god called him with many callings and manifold : ' Œdipus, Œdipus, why delay we to go ? Thou tarriest too long ! ' "
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> (*Œdipus Coloneus*, 1610—1628 ;
> Sir. R. C. Jebb's Translation.)

Contrast this work of the imagination with that actual dying scene in the little hut at the Porziuncola. Love is there, too : love the omnipotent ; and sorrow at the rending of human ties most dear. But there is no fear ; for in the hearts of all there is a love that casts out fear. And in the wasted figure in the midst is a

spirit that meets death without a tremor. It will never be forgotten, while generation hands on to generation the immortal sayings of the past, how Francis looked to the doorway, as though a friend stood framed in it, and said with great composure : " Welcome, Sister Death ! " And then he said gently to his physician : " She is to me the gate of life."

They read to him the Passion Narrative from St. John's Gospel, having first removed his habit and laid him on the bare ground, with his arms stretched out as on a Cross. So he had commanded them strictly, and while strength remained had anticipated and rehearsed the final scene.

At sunset on the 3rd day of October, 1226, he breathed his last. He who had kept a great heart in a little house had been translated to the house not made with hands.

The Stigmata were now at length unveiled to curious eyes, and a constant stream of people came in the darkness to see the dead body of their beloved Saint. It was a night of bitter weeping at the Porziuncola. In the morning the body was carried to Assisi, not by the direct road but past San Damiano, that Clare and the sisters might look upon his face. In this some saw the fulfilment of the dying message to Clare. The procession wound its sad yet triumphant way to

the Church of San Giorgio, from the pulpit of which Francis had first preached. And there the body found a temporary resting-place. On the 16th July, 1228, Francis was canonized by Gregory IX, and became the Saint of Assisi.

Two of his sayings in the last days of his life may serve for his epitaph : " Happy shall they be who persevere in those things which they have begun " ; and those words spoken to his disciples, and not to be forgotten by others who have learned from him lessons of life : " I have done what it was mine to do ; may Christ teach you what is yours."

CHAPTER X

THE LEGENDS

A LIFE so picturesque and so saintly as that of Francis lends itself readily to the embroidery of legend. If the reader has ever the good fortune to make a pilgrimage of love and remembrance to Assisi, let him not fail to drive by the hill paths, mounting ever higher, till the hermitage of the Carceri is reached. There the good monks will tell him many marvels, and will show him where St. Francis, victorious over the Devil, flung that troubler of mankind through a narrow hole into the gorge below. And if his own imagination is awake, and submissive to the subtle influence of his surroundings, he will picture to himself almost as a fact that ignominious descent of Satan.

It was in such hermitages and mountain monasteries that the legendary power of the Franciscan artist in words found free scope. There the veneration of Francis lingered in its purest form ; there around the fire on the winter evenings the brothers gave glory to their founder by the creative artistry of love. They had a great

treasure of popular story, and of pious tradition, which provided a frame upon which they might fashion their delicate and beautiful embellishments of historic fact. And as all of them were steeped in the early lives, and the accepted facts, no one was deceived by the pleasant craft of the story-teller ; while at the same time the product of his imagination was persuasively true to the original portrait, and in other and later Franciscan circles took its place among the veritable wonders of the wonderful life.

How readily the legends might grow out of the reality is illustrated in the group of nature miracles ascribed to Francis. There we are dealing with a human faculty, rare in its highest forms, sufficiently common in its lower phases. Those who have seen the wizard of the Tuileries Gardens exercising his spell over the sparrows, and manifesting his comradeship with them, have gone a long way towards the understanding of St. Francis and his sisters the birds in their love for one another. Giotto's faded fresco in the Upper Church of St. Francis at Assisi reveals how that tender companionship lingered in the minds of men as something exquisitely characteristic, and no one who has not realized that side of the Saint's nature can be called a true Franciscan. Yet we do well to approach that sweet intimacy

of Francis with the birds and the beasts, not from the side of the supernatural, but along the pathways of the natural. In the perfection and grace of the birds, and in their dependence on a Divine Hand, the Poor Man of Assisi saw a revelation of God that comforted his own soul. Above all he loved the little "cowled lark," and he found in her an emblem: "Sister Lark hath a hood like a Religious and is a humble bird, because she goeth blithely along the road to find for herself a few grains of corn. . . . As she flieth she praiseth God very sweetly, just as the good Religious who looking down upon earthly things have their conversation even in the heavens, and are ever intent upon the praise of God. Like unto the earth are her garments, that is her feathers, and she giveth an example unto the Religious, that they should not possess delicate and coloured garments but such as are of little worth."

The testimony of his nearest companions confirms his love of the larks: "We who were with the Blessed Francis, and have written these things, bring forward this testimony that many times we have heard him say: 'If ever I shall speak to the Emperor, I will ask him entreatingly and earnestly that he will for the love of God and of myself make a special law that no

man shall catch or kill our sisters the larks, or do any harm to them ; and in like manner that all the authorities of cities and lords of castles and towns be required every year on the day of the Nativity of our Lord to compel men to throw wheat and other grain along the roads outside the cities and castles, so that our sisters the larks, and other birds as well, may have something to eat on that day of such great solemnity."

It was noted by all as a gracious coincidence, that a flock of these beloved little larks lighted on the roof of the cell where Francis had just died, and sang sweet praises over the home-coming of the gentle spirit that had loved them with so great an affection. Love is power ; and those who love birds and animals, and observe their ways minutely, become endued with a power that disarms the most timid of their fear, and the fiercest of their anger. Such a faculty manifested itself more and more in the life of the Poor Man, who slept under the shining of the stars, and was awake and abroad when other men slumbered. Yet up to a point we have no hint of miracle.

It was after one of the inner crises of his life that some suggestion of a deeper understanding breaks into the narrative. Francis was torn by doubt, in the spring of 1213, as to his highest

duty. Was he to lead a contemplative life of prayer, or was he to wander and preach? He could not decide, and in his perplexity he sent Masseo to Clare and to Sylvester. These were to seek God's special guidance in prayer, and when their minds were secure in the understanding of God's will they were to send an answer through Masseo. The messenger sought Clare first, and afterwards Sylvester: both after meditation and prayer returned the one answer, Francis must preach and win souls.

Great honour did Francis give to his envoy. He washed his feet, and made ready for him a meal, and served him with great humility. Then they repaired together to a neighbouring wood; and Francis kneeled down before Masseo and spread out his arms in the fashion of a cross. Thus he listened in abasement of body and of will to the judgment of Clare and of Sylvester. He met the revelation of his vocation with a mighty stirring of consecration. Springing to his feet, he cried: "Then let us go forth in the name of God."

It was on that going forth that he met his little sisters the birds in a great multitude that gathered by the wayside between Cannara and Bevagna. Such a story cannot be paraphrased, but must be told with the early creative touch

in every word : " And as he was passing he lifted up his eyes and saw, close by the wayside, trees, in which were perched so great a multitude of birds of divers kinds, that in those parts the like had never before been seen. In the field beside the trees, a very great number of others were to be seen. St. Francis looking upon and marvelling at this crowd of birds, the Spirit of God coming upon him, said to his companions : ' While you wait for me here on the road, I will go and preach to our sisters, the little birds.' And he went into the field to the birds that were resting on the ground.

" And immediately, when he began to preach, all the birds perched up in the trees flew down towards him, and, together with the others in the field, remained motionless, while nevertheless he himself went amongst them, touching very many with his tunic. Still, not one of them at all moved, as was related by Brother James of Massa, a holy man who received all the beforementioned details from the mouth of Brother Masseo, who was one of those who then were the companions of the holy father.

" To these birds St. Francis said : ' Ye are much cared for by God, ye birds my sisters, and ye ought to praise Him ever and everywhere, because ye have freedom to fly everywhere,

because ye have a twofold and threefold clothing, because ye have plumage painted and adorned, because ye have food prepared without your labour, because song hath been taught you by your Creator, because by the blessing of God ye were preserved in the Ark from perishing, because of the element of air allotted to you. Ye sow not, neither do ye reap, and yet God feedeth you, and He giveth you rivers and springs to drink from, mountains and hills, rocks and spreading trees for refuge, and lofty trees in which to build your nests ; and since to spin or weave ye know not how, He provideth both for yourselves and your offspring the clothing ye need. Wherefore the Creator who conferreth on you so many benefits loveth you much. Therefore take heed, little birds, my sisters, lest ye be ungrateful, and study always to give praise unto God.'

" At these words of the most saintly father, all these birds began to open their beaks, to spread their wings and stretch out their necks and reverently to bend their heads to the ground and to show by their songs and motions that the words which St. Francis had spoken had given them manifold delight. St. Francis when he saw this, rejoiced in spirit marvellously, and was struck with wonder at so great a multitude

of birds, and at the very beautiful variety of them, and also with their affection and their harmonious friendliness, and especially in them he praised the Creator of such marvellous creatures, and sweetly invited them to sing their Creator's praise.

"When he had finished preaching to them and exhorting them to sing the praises of God, he made over all the birds the sign of the cross, and instantly admonished them to praise God. Then all the birds together flew on high, and in the air together raised a loud and wondrous song; and when they had ended the song they divided themselves into four equal clusters, and flew away in the four directions indicated by the cross made over them by the holy father."

Now this is not only a beautiful tale, but it is beautifully embellished. Fact and fiction shade into one another so subtly, that one cannot be sure where the divisions are to be found. Francis nowhere oversteps the bounds of his whimsical nature. It is the birds who provide us with the tonic of the supernatural, and who fly away at last in the form of a perfect cross to the four corners of the earth, fleet symbols of the brethren who would carry the gospel, by the slower ways of land and sea, north and south and east and west.

Whatever be the literal truth of this famous tale, we may feel certain that something happened

that assured Francis of the freedom of the great city of nature, conferred upon him for the rest of his days on earth.

More complex, more wonderful, is the legend of the Wolf of Gubbio ; which has so significant a message for humanity that our modern criticism translates the animal into a man, leader of the wolfish bandits who harried the respectability of Gubbio. But there is independent evidence that, at the time of the visit of Francis, the wolves of the neighbourhood, made bold by hunger, were invading the streets of Gubbio and carrying off their prey. Moreover, a wolf's skull has been found beneath the foundations of the ancient Church at Gubbio, which commemorates Francis and his exploit. Therefore the great hungry wolf of the legend may remain a wolf, so far as we are concerned. That Francis went forth to tame him, as he went forth out of the Christian lines to tame the Sultan, is beyond dispute. That the wolf felt the supernatural power and friendliness of this strange visitor to his lair, who may question ? Nor does it give us pause that Francis spoke to him as a brother, rebuked him as a murderer, preached to him forgiveness, and assured him that his life would be spared, and his food found for him.

This is just Francis, as we know and love

him ; brave, fantastic, simple beyond human simplicity, yet wise beyond human wisdom. It is Brother Wolf who is the supernatural character in the embroidered story. That, mastered and docile, he was led into the town, and thus tamed became the pampered pet of the children of Gubbio, does not stretch our credulity too far. But when the treaty of peace was signed in the market place ; when the populace acclaimed their promise to spare and feed the wolf, and when the Saint put his side of the bargain to Brother Wolf before them all, then we enter completely the dear region of Franciscan fable. Yet is it not the sweetest of fables ?

" Then promised all the folk with one accord to give him food abidingly. Then quoth St. Francis to the wolf before them all : ' And thou, Brother Wolf, dost thou make promise to keep firm this pact of peace, that thou offend not man nor beast nor any creature ? ' And the wolf knelt him down and bowed his head : and with gentle movements of his body, tail, and eyes, gave sign as best he could that he would keep their pact entire. Quoth St. Francis : ' Brother Wolf, I wish that as thou hast pledged me thy faith to this promise without the gate, even so shouldest thou pledge me thy faith to thy promise before all the people, and that thou

play me not false for my promise and the surety that I have given for thee.'

"Then the wolf, lifting up his right paw, laid it in the hand of St. Francis. Therewith, this act, and the others set forth above, wrought such great joy and marvel in all the people, both through devotion to the Saint, and through the newness of the miracle, and through the peace with the wolf, that all began to lift up their voices unto heaven praising and blessing God, that had sent St. Francis unto them, who by his merits had set them free from the jaws of the cruel beast. And thereafter this same wolf lived two years in Gubbio ; and went like a tame beast in and out the houses, from door to door, without doing hurt to any or any doing hurt to him, and was courteously nourished by the people ; and as he passed thuswise through the country and the houses, never did any dog bark behind him. At length after a two years' space, brother wolf died of old age ; whereat the townsfolk sorely grieved, since marking him pass so gently through the city, they minded them the better of the virtue and the sanctity of St. Francis."

But Francis had other converse than with birds and animals, and about this secret life of prayer have gathered some of the most arresting legends. For its white radiance of

holiness we may scarcely parallel the story of the little boy, very pure and innocent, who was received into the Order, and who loved and imitated Francis with the fervour of a boy's hero-worship. He was curious, too, with a child's curiosity, and longed to know what Francis did in the long dark hours while the others slept. Accordingly, after the Saint had lain down to rest, the little boy tied the cord of his robe to the cord of Francis, that when the Saint arose, he might waken and follow. But the Saint awoke, and perceived the boy's device: looking gently down into the sleeping face, he untied the knot, and went out into the forest to pray. Then the boy awoke with a start to find the cord loosed, and his hero gone. Stealing past the sleeping brothers he went out among the trees till he heard the sound of voices. Drawing nearer he saw a wonderful light shining around Francis where he kneeled. And in the light were Christ, and Mary, and John the Baptist, and John the Evangelist, and a great multitude of angels, holding converse with the blessed Francis.

The sight was too startling, and the lad fainted, and lay where he fell till Francis, coming homewards, stumbled over his body. Then like the good shepherd with his sheep, he gathered

the poor lamb in his arms and carried him back to his couch. And in the morning the Saint learned of that strange vision and bade the boy keep silence, so long as his master lived.

Here, in this imagination of things heavenly, we have no foothold on solid ground at all, while the absence of historical tradition is skilfully covered by the boy's strict promise to Francis. Nevertheless it is a beautiful setting forth of the comforts of the life of prayer by those who were masters of that lonely knowledge. Yet in their profound knowledge they counted themselves but as learners compared with the Poverello, and they wove this picture in the lovely tapestry of their legend, that they might reveal more surely to men the inner spirit of their great Founder.

We may join with this legend the strange event of that day when Francis and Masseo went into a church together to pray. The Saint hid himself behind the altar, and fell into such a rapture of prayer that when they emerged from the church he was as one filled with some mighty inspiration. He was as though he breathed forth flames of love, is the expression of the Fioretti. "Give thyself to me, Brother Masseo," he said; and straightway depriving him of all volition the mighty energy of the Saint's spirit lifted poor Masseo up into the air, and

projected him a great spear's length through space. The modern spiritualist may make what he likes of this thirteenth century instance of levitation ; for us we should pity Masseo for this indignity, worse, one would imagine, than his spinning like a top at the cross-roads, of which we have heard already, were it not that he boasted to his dying day that never had he tasted such spiritual sweetness as when he was flying through the air before the mighty spiritual energy of the Saint.

Such a story leads us on to the healing miracles. That Francis had healing gifts we need not doubt. But for a full-flavoured miracle of this class we must go to the Fioretti, and the story of that most afflicted and most blasphemous leper, who affrighted his attendants in the leper hospital. They, being brothers of the Order, took their story to Francis, and he coming to the leper found that miserable man in the extremity of anger and revolt against God and man. The "God give thee peace" which fell so tenderly from the lips of Francis seemed but a provocation to the leper. What chance had he of peace of mind or peace of body, outcast, tormented, desolate ?

Francis would have him consider that bodily calamity humbly accepted may be God's gift and grace of salvation to a human soul. But the leper

is obdurate, and vents his anger on the misdeeds and negligences of his attendants. "Let me serve thee, brother," said Francis. And boiling some water and making it fragrant with sweet-smelling herbs, the Saint began to wash that terrible body. And lo! as he touched it, the leprosy began to disappear, and the flesh came again, clean and pure, and the wounds were healed, and, best of all, the evil spirit of blasphemy was replaced by the humble spirit of penitence.

Then Francis departed, and went his way to a distant place. And the penitent leper lived but a short time, for so God willed it; and died a holy death in the communion of the Church. Then his soul, in its flight to Paradise, appeared to Francis as the Saint was kneeling in prayer, and made itself known to him in these words: "I am the leper whom Christ, the Blessed One, healed through thy merits, and now I go unto life eternal; blessed be thy soul and body; and blessed be thy holy words and works, for through thee shall many souls in the world be saved, and know of a truth that there is no day in the world wherein the Holy Angels and the other Saints give not praise to God for the holy fruits that thou and thy Order gather in diverse parts of the world; wherefore be comforted, and give thanks to God, and abide steadfast with His

blessing." So speaking, the leper's soul winged onwards in its heavenward way, and Francis rejoiced with a holy joy.

Compare this miracle with a well-attested work of healing, in which by prayer and spiritual reinforcement he cured of paralysis an evil-living canon, one Gideon, who in spite of the stern warning of Francis, returned to his sin, and met his death suddenly by the collapse of a house ; you will see how far the legendary embroiderers have improved upon the methods of reality.

The halo of miracle is round the head of many whose lives touched that of Francis. When Clare is bidden by the Pope to make the sign of the Cross over the loaves of bread which she set before him and his train, behold the Cross is marvellously imprinted on every loaf. Anthony of Padua preaches to the fish of the sea who behave even more submissively than the birds with St. Francis. The Devil appears frequently to poor Brother Ruffino ; and Brother John of Alvernia seems to dwell beyond the veil, rather than among the sights and sounds of common life. Sometimes the hand that writes the legend seems to lose its cunning, and the farther we are from Francis, the farther we are from the good dry land of probability.

Yet in the midst of the legends we often find a perfect, flawless piece of imaginative workmanship, such as that which must close this chapter, the strange tale of the visit of St. Louis, King of France, to Brother Giles at Perugia. For the King was visiting the holy places of faith and religion, and his heart was inflamed with a great desire to see Brother Giles, and speak with him of Francis, and carry away with him some of that choice wisdom for which Brother Giles, of all men living, was renowned. Meekly, and with few companions, he knocked at the door of the Brothers' House in Perugia, and asked speech of Giles, not disclosing his rank and name. But Brother Giles learned these things in a vision, and made haste and ran to meet the King. And though they were strangers, they greeted each the other after the usage of ancient friendship. For they embraced most lovingly, yet in silence, never a word being spoken. And, having in silence looked long in one another's faces, they parted, St. Louis for his journey, Brother Giles for his cell. But it was noised abroad among the brothers of what rank and place their visitor had been ; for the King's followers had not maintained their discretion. Then disappointment and heaviness fell upon them all, that Giles had spoken not a word, and that the King had

departed without his spiritual comfort. They brought their murmuring and complaining to Brother Giles, chiding him for his discourtesy to a King so holy, who had journeyed from his own Kingdom of France to have speech with Giles, and to hear good words. Thereupon Giles made answer thus: "Dear Brothers, do not wonder that neither I to him nor he to me could speak a word; for as soon as we embraced each other, the light of heavenly wisdom revealed to me his heart, and mine to him; and thus through divine working, each looking on the other's heart, we knew what I would say to him and he to me, far better than if we had spoken with our mouths, and with more comfort than if we had sought to show forth in words the feelings of our hearts. Wherefore know ye that the King departed from me wonderfully comforted."

Perhaps it is so the legends help us most surely, not by their speech, but by their silences. Behind the lines that we read stand in silence the great figures of that heroic movement. We look into their hearts, and search the motives of their gallant lives. And so, though they will not speak to us, and though we who seek be neither kings nor saints, we turn away with consolation in our souls.

CHAPTER XI

THE FOURTH ORDER OF ST. FRANCIS

It is told of Brother Leo, whom Francis called "God's little lamb," that in prayer or vision he once seemed to stand beside a broad and swift river. And watching he saw many step down into the water with burdens upon their backs. These were speedily swept away and drowned, save some who struggled a third of the way across, or even to the middle of the swirling waters. But these also were overwhelmed and lost in the depths. For them all Brother Leo felt acute sorrow of heart. Suddenly a great company came down to the river bank without load or burden of any kind, and these plunged into the stream, and made light of its dangers, and reached the other bank in safety. Whereupon Brother Leo awoke, and being with Francis at the time, asked him concerning his dream and its interpretation. Francis replied that the dream was a revelation of truth ; that the great river is this world ; that those drowned in the stream were such as remained not true to the life of the

Gospel ; while those who crossed without peril had renounced the world. These were temperate in food and clothing, content with but a little. They followed Christ and gloried in His Cross. With goodness and rejoicing they bore the yoke of Christ and found it sweet. The life of holy obedience permitted them to pass through things temporal without loss of the things that are eternal.

We look to-day at the great river from a place on its banks far from the view-point of Francis and Leo. The river is broader where we stand, and harder to cross, and even more than Brother Leo do we find our hearts burdened with the multitude who, carrying heavy loads upon their backs, are swept away long ere they win to sure footing on the other bank. And standing there upon the brink we question our consciences of those unburdened ones, whom Leo saw in their safe and triumphant passage and whom Francis claimed as the faithful Brothers of his Order.

Is there not a deadly insincerity in praising Francis, if we do not imitate him ? May we venerate a way of life which we refuse to follow ? The answer to such questions lies in the word "vocation," a word of which one section of the Church has been needlessly afraid, perhaps because the other section has so frequently

misused it. It was on that imperative sense of a Divine Will and a Divine call that the Poor Man of Assisi built his sacrificial life. In thinking of him we have no need to entangle ourselves in the question of a double standard of conduct, or to debate if some are called to a lower way of life and others to the way of perfection. These are side issues. In the question of vocation, treated by itself, and regarded in the light of Him who knows the heart, is the challenge to every man's conscience, whatever be his place in the broken Body of the Church.

This primacy of vocation, revealed by God to the seeking heart, through many channels of grace, was maintained by St. Francis in the example and in the teaching of his own dedicated life. He declined to judge others in the use that they made of life, or in the relation that they bore to material things. Even the vulnerable priesthood of his day escaped censure or the suggestion that their life was ignoble. To everyone is given his own shining track of light. In that he must walk, to that he must be faithful.

But Francis went still further. His Third Order is a deliberate justification of ordinary life, while at the same time it sought to penetrate that life with great ideals, and to suffuse it with

great joys. We are able, perhaps, to see the Franciscan ideal more purely and graciously revealed in the Third Order than in the hard way of its founder's vocation and renunciation. Francis had a message to all the world, yet all the world cannot be monk or nun. The Religious Orders seem to many to have been a temporary expedient, rather than a permanent solution of the great problem. It is hard to redeem the world, if you withdraw too far from it, and the Redemption of the world is God's purpose revealed in Christ. The free spirit of Francis forged chains for himself and others to wear because it was God's will for him, and because the thirteenth century needed the flaming example of that great renunciation.

Yet when we seek in this twentieth century to be learners in the school of Francis, the lesson that attracts us is the daring transference of his ideal into the contradictory environment of the Third Order. There we escape from the particular to the universal, from that which was right for Francis, to that which is right for every man and woman under the sun. In the Third Order the Saint touches the universal heart and points the universal way.

Never was it more true than now that the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the

manifestation of the sons of God. In spite of the Great War, which placarded materialism before the world in its ugliness and failure ; in spite of the conquering spiritual tendencies in the worlds of philosophy and science ; in spite of a sharper conscience concerning the sufferings of the poor ; in spite of every light that shines in a dark world, the insolence of wealth and the craving for material possessions remain the dominant and disturbing factors in human society to-day.

The spirit of Francis of Assisi can help us back to humanity and back to Christ. It may teach us, not, it may be, to disown our possessions but to own them serviceably, and to guard vigilantly lest by our selfishness they come to own us. Let us not distrust that teaching. For the spirit of Francis will ever lead us to Christ. It is an arresting fact that in his own religious world the Saint had no eye save for Christ alone. His preaching, his last testament, his death-bed, all reveal the concentrated passion of his heart for the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. No reverence for saints and angels, not even the worship of Mary, distracted his soul from its ceaseless imitation of Christ and dependence upon Christ. His whole life and teaching might be summed up in those words of beauty which Mr.

Laurence Housman puts into his mouth, as he stands before the Sultan :

> " Oh, hearken, for this is wonder !
> Light looked down and beheld darkness.
> ' Thither will I go,' said Light.
> Peace looked down and beheld War.
> ' Thither will I go,' said Peace.
> Love looked down and beheld Hatred.
> ' Thither will I go,' said Love.
> So came Light and shone.
> So came Peace and gave rest.
> So came Love and brought Life.
> And the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us."

Here is the authentic message which St. Francis translated into the deeds and sufferings and infinite joys of his venturesome life. With this persuasive gospel of Peace and Love and Life he ministered to his own age, and to the clamant needs of his own time. Let all who love his memory take heart. These words shall never lack their power, nor want their witness before the children of men.

On the tomb of one who challenged his generation with a new message are carved these words written by himself : " The truth that I have tried to make clear will not find easy acceptance. If that could be, it would have been accepted long ago. If that could be, it would never have been obscured. But it will find friends—those who will toil for it, suffer for

it, if need be, die for it. That is the power of truth."

It is in such a faith that we lift up the spirit of St. Francis for the guidance of the world's stumbling steps to-day. That spirit of tender humanity and simplicity and humility will find friends in every generation—those who will toil for it, suffer for it, if need be, die for it. That is the power of truth.

Francis himself resisted every effort made to divert him from the straight path of his obedience to Christ. At the famous "Chapter of Mats," when five thousand brethren were gathered, Ugolino, the friendly Cardinal who protected the Order, was present. He was strangely moved at what he saw. When he looked at the brothers sitting on the plain around the Porziuncola in orderly groups, here forty, here eighty, here a hundred, and saw them all living together in love, without sound of strife or contention, he cried out of the wonder of his heart: "This is in truth the camp and army of the Knights of God." Yet the inward harmony was not as perfect as the outward semblance. Very learned and able men had by this time joined the Order, and some of these came to the Cardinal and said: "My lord, we wish you would persuade Brother Francis that he follow the

counsel of the brethren that are wise, and permit himself sometimes to be guided by them." And they fortified their argument by quotations from the Rule of St. Benedict and the Rule of St. Augustine and the Rule of St. Bernard. The Cardinal passed on a measure of this advice to Francis who answered him not a word, but took him by the hand and led him to the assembled brethren. And there in the fervour and valour of the Holy Spirit, as the old narrative has it, Francis cried aloud: "My brothers! my brothers! God has called me by the way of simplicity and of humility, and this way hath He in truth pointed out to me for myself and for those who are willing to trust in me and to follow me. And therefore I wish that ye do not name to me any Rule, either that of St. Benedict, or that of St. Augustine, or that of St. Bernard, or any way and method of living except that which hath been mercifully made known and imparted unto me by the Lord. And the Lord hath told me that He wished me to be a new covenant in this world, and desired not to lead us in any other way than by the knowledge of that."

It is such superb faithfulness to an ideal, and to the guidance of God's hand, given to every human soul that seeks it through the only Mediator, Jesus Christ our Lord, that can make

the lawless Christianity of our time a veritable camp and army of the Knights of God. How beautiful upon the mountains will be the feet of those who publish the glad tidings of the Franciscan message, which is the gospel of the love of Christ set to the music of an adoring heart. That the rich should live simply in order that they may give greatly and generously ; that family life should be pure and self-denying and blessed of God ; that the dealings of man with man in the market-place should be just and loving ; that the poor should be saved from oppression and squalor, and given their share of earth and air and beauty and joy ; that rich and poor alike should learn to delight in simple things, and find springs of joy in friendship with God, and friendship with man, and friendship with nature and her lovely things ; these are the watchwords of the crusade to which young and generous hearts are called to-day. It is a joyous gospel for a world of false allurements, where even the face of beauty and innocence is painted and powdered into falsehood and ugliness.

To-day is the God-given opportunity for the Fourth Order of St. Francis, which exists in every land, though nameless and unknown.

Mr. Chesterton speaks of the Third Order as a great secret society. But the Fourth Order is still

more secret, so secret that it is yet without a name, so scattered that it includes men and women in every phase of human life the wide world over. The Third Order is shut against them, for they own not the allegiance of Rome. And to them the hard asceticism of the First and Second Orders offers no true solution of that present world-situation which needs the best and bravest and purest and most self-denying right at the heart of life, in the places where the battle against greed and lust must ever be waged for human deliverance.

It is the Fourth Order then that welcomes and shelters those, a great multitude, outside the Church of Rome, to whom the Poor Little Man of Assisi has been the minister of a wonderful and tender revelation. When life has offered them its grosser things, his hand has helped to pluck them away, and his voice has called them to the simple and joyful satisfactions of existence—to good comradeship and plain living, to the brotherhood of the elements, to the warmth of the sun and to the shining of the stars, to purposes that are unselfish, and to hopes that are unfading.

When we dream the dreams of our higher life, we see stealing through the shadows on his age-long quest the form of our brother Francis ; and sometimes we rise up in thought and purpose,

and follow him through the shadows to the sunshine of Christ.

Ever we hear Francis bidding us, as he bade his brothers, "to keep a great heart in a little house." This is the gift of the Poor Man of Assisi to all who inhabit the little house of the human body—a faith that knows no fear, a hope that knows no end, a love that reaches to the loveless, a joy strangely compounded out of sorrow and suffering, and a comradeship that counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Fourth Order of St. Francis may be a spiritual home to multitudes of young and eager hearts who have not found in the turmoil of to-day a purpose and a meaning for life. Whatever be their earthly calling, whether they be rich or poor, there is welcome for them in the hospitable home of these great ideals of brotherhood and of joy. But only if they are utterly loyal to Christ and His Church. Else are they not of the spirit of the Poverello. For it is the glory of Francis of Assisi that he leads us past himself, and bows our hearts in obedience to the Lord and Saviour of men.

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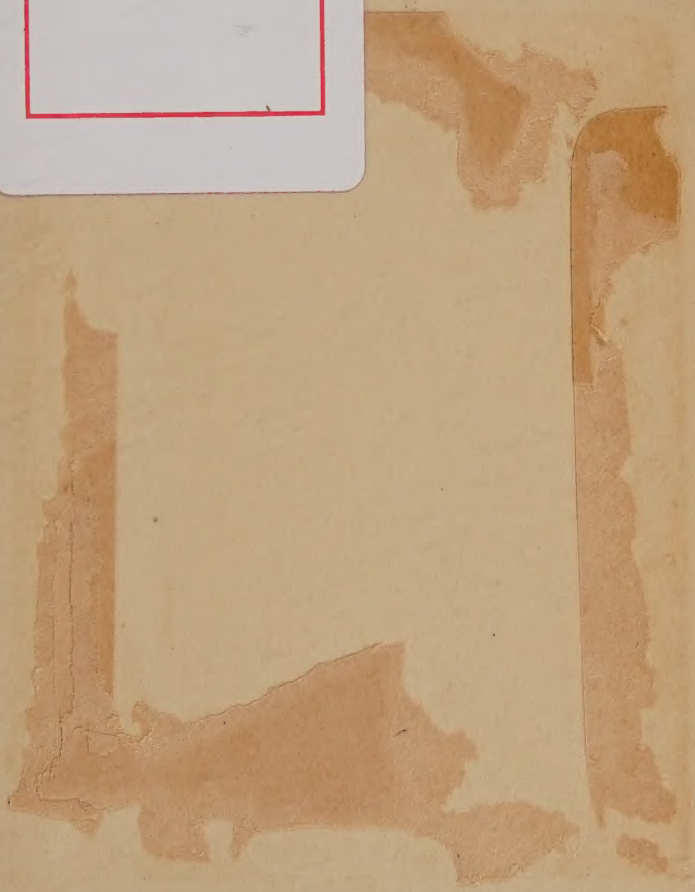

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